

# The genesis and operation of the Royal Bounty scheme 1725-30

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## Difficulties faced by ministers in the Gàidhealtachd during the early eighteenth century

Although it had been over thirty years since the established Church of Scotland had reverted to presbyterianism in 1690, the number of Gaelic-speaking clergy, especially in the north-west, was still pitifully small.<sup>1</sup> Amongst the manifold difficulties facing these ministers, the commonest complaint concerned the sheer unwieldiness of their parishes, many of which had remained largely unchanged since the medieval era. Larger parishes, with their widely scattered population, could comprehend several different places of worship, sometimes as many as four or five, as was the case for Ardnamurchan, “so very Large, Populous and discontiguous that it is Work enough for ffour Ministers”.<sup>2</sup> Rough territory and weather meant that travel was exceptionally arduous for minister and congregation alike: the Presbytery of Gairloch had to traverse “Severall Bayes Water Lochs Torrent Rivers and pass through spacious Deserts and Hudge mountains”, while perhaps a quarter of the parishioners of Rev. James Gilchrist of Kilmallie would be unable to hear him more than once every two months.

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<sup>1</sup> For background see Douglas Ansdell, *The people of the great faith: the Highland church, 1690-1900* (Stornoway, 1998), 6-32; Andrew L. Drummond and James Bulloch, *The Scottish church 1688-1843: the Age of the Moderates* (Edinburgh, 1973), 1-44; Victor Edward Durcacz, *The decline of the Celtic languages* (Edinburgh, 1983), 1-30, 45-65; William Ferguson, “The problems of the established church in the west Highlands and Islands in the eighteenth century”, *RSCHS.*, 17 (1972), 15-31; Mary McHugh, “The religious condition of the Highlands and Islands in the mid-eighteenth century”, *IR.*, 35 (1984), 12-21; John MacInnes, *The evangelical movement in the Highlands of Scotland 1680-1800* (Aberdeen, 1951), 10-78; Charles W.J. Withers, *Gaelic Scotland: the transformation of a culture region* (London, 1988), 121-45.

<sup>2</sup> NAS, CH1/2/57, fo. 250.

And This is alwise so even supposing the people never hindered by storms of wind and rain from attending at the severall meeting places within their reach, but then taking hinderances of this nature into the Account, and the frequency of them ariseing from high winds and waters, and both making it exceeding difficult to travel over high & steep mountains ragged rocks and deep Marishes; and considering yet how frequent such storms are, and how many such Mountains, Rocks, Marishes and Rivers, it may be justly reckon'd that every fourth person in the parish does not hear sermon of a Sabbath day above once a Quarter; and many of them those particularly in the projected wings of the Parish not perhaps in a half years time.<sup>3</sup>

The summer trip to the shielings with the cattle made preaching impracticable during that season: in Gilchrist's parish "the Generality of the people in time of Summer and harvest yearly live in Sheillings which lye some at a great distance from their Wintertouns in large wastes that lye betwixt Lochabber and other Countries".<sup>4</sup> Travel in winter, on the other hand, was treacherous: the Rev. John MacInnes of Crathie preached in two places by turns, "to the farthest of which places I must very often travell on ffoot, it not being safe to travel to it on Horseback, by Reason of the vast quantitys of Ice which one every where meets with one the Way when there is any great Storm of ffrost and Snow on the Ground, and that on many Lord's Days altho the Way should be clear of Snow & Ice & that one could ride it without any Stop, yet I'm frequently so chill'd with the Winter Cold and fatigue'd wt Gravel that I'm very indispos'd for my work at my Journey's End."<sup>5</sup> Rivers in spate were extremely hazardous: in the parish of Morvern, "Not many years Since twelve men all at once lost on one of the Waters, Coming to Sermon, & above two or three Since."<sup>6</sup> Where there was fatigue and danger, there was also humiliation: MacInnes writes of how "while I'm employ'd among the People about the Duties of

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<sup>3</sup> NAS, CH1/2/53, fos. 232, 237-8.

<sup>4</sup> NAS, CH1/2/53, fo. 238.

<sup>5</sup> NAS, CH1/2/53, fo. 225v.; for the unruly situation in the parish at the time, cf. John Grant, *Legends of the Braes o' Mar* (Aberdeen, 1910), 137-87.

<sup>6</sup> NAS, CH1/2/59, fo. 195; cf. /70, fo. 350.

my ffunction, I am but very indifferently serv'd for Lodging being necessitate for many Nights to tarry in poor People's Houses where I must ly on a cold earthen floor, having no better Conveniency for a bed than some Straw to which mean Accomodation the rest of my Intertainment may well be suppos'd to correspond."<sup>7</sup> According to the Rev. Donald MacQueen of the Small Isles

The minister being obliged to have his crew still with him he must have a lodgeing for himself and them in every Island he goes to, and such lodgeing as he can be provided with being at best but one of the small huts they build for their Cattel, he is still worse accommodated than the poorest servant in his Paroch, and yet he must own himself as much favoured by one who allows him the use of one of these huts as if it had been the finest palace, tho he not only wants conveniency for Studying but his health is frequently impaired.<sup>8</sup>

If and when the minister reached his destination, he would generally have to preach outside; even the main church of the parish might be little more than a neglected roofless ruin: MacQueen writes of how "in Roum where there is something of a congregation the minister must preach in the open field when the weather admitts of the people's conveening in one place from the severall corners of the Island", while in 1737 the church at the synod seat of Glenelg "is not roofed as yet and the Couples which the parishioners have brought 7 years agoe are rotting under the rain in the open fields scarce worth the setting up".<sup>9</sup> It should be remembered just how disjointed many mainland parishes were, with portions and pendicles scattered often at some distance from the principal seat of worship. In many districts the neat and orderly consolidation carried out in the Victorian era has obscured the crazy patchwork of earlier times, a seemingly haphazard arrangement rooted in the old medieval estates.

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<sup>7</sup> NAS, CH1/2/53, fo. 225v.

<sup>8</sup> NAS, CH1/2/59, fo. 44.

<sup>9</sup> NAS, CH1/2/59, fo. 44v.; /72, fo. 171: cf. fos. 165, 170.

If the mainland parish was all too often an enormous, mountainous, disjointed tract of land, the island parishes were generally even worse. The conscientious minister would visit each of the several islands in his charge, having to pay dear, of course, for the various ferry and accommodation charges he would incur. MacQueen “must alwayes have four sufficient Servants for no other end than to ferry him from one Island to another, besides what other servants he will require to have at the place of his ordinary residence, and the ferries being long and dangerous he cannot have a Sufficient crew for what wages Servants usually have in these parts... [T]here being convenient harbours in two of the Islands of this Paroch viz Eagg and Canna, and for lesser boats in the other two, there is such a resort of people into each of them that whatever part of the Parish he is in, he meets with Strangers and must consequently be exposed to no Small charges that way since he must alwayes lodge near the Harbours.”<sup>10</sup> The seas, treacherous enough in summer, were frequently quite unnavigable during winter, from October until April. Small wonder, then, that we read of the Presbytery of Kintyre urging the General Assembly to “have a Speciall regaird to the Clamant Circumstances” of the parish of Jura and Colonsay, “the Lyke whereof Cannot be paraleal’d In the whole Highlands of Scotland nor perhaps In any part of the Christian world”.<sup>11</sup>

Many Highland ministries were thus an extraordinarily demanding, lonely, with little or no support from the civil authorities, and not a little discouraging. Deprived of regular preaching, parishioners would soon fall prey to, in the words of the Presbytery of Kincardine O’Neil “Coldness, Carelessness, Deadness, willfull Ignorance, profaneness, Contempt of the word & Estrangement from the Life of Religion, as being Such habitual Strangers to the Instituted means whereby Grace is begun and Nourished!”<sup>12</sup> In March 1729, writing of the Synod of Glenelg, of which he was moderator, the Rev. Daniel MacAulay declaims:

We are sensible, as we serve Our great Master with more weakness,  
so likewise with more toyl & danger; we toyl on foot through Rocks

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<sup>10</sup> NAS, CH1/2/59, fo. 44.

<sup>11</sup> NAS, CH1/2/59, fo. 167v.

<sup>12</sup> NAS, CH1/2/53, fo. 226.



and Hills, Mosses & Muires, we toyl by Sea & land as a kind of Amphibious Creatures, of which our lean bodys & brawny feet & fists are Documents: we oft Wade thro' cold waters even in the dead of Winter when we have no oyr drink than ye uncomfortable defluction of Ice & Snow<sup>13</sup>

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An obvious solution would be to split the largest parishes and to erect new ones. However, a variety of stumbling-blocks stood in the way, above all the objections of local heritors to any such scheme. As well as paying the stipend out of the parish teinds, landowners were legally required to provide and maintain church, manse, glebe (four “soums” capable of supporting four cows or forty sheep), grass (to support the minister’s horse and two cows) and communion elements. Not only did they tend to be unwilling to pay the extra – usually quite considerable – expense; often, given the poor quality of their estates, it was burdensome enough to pay for the minister they had, let alone to finance an additional one serving a new parish. To make matters worse, a clause inserted into the relevant act of parliament of 1707 stated that a parish could not be split save with the consent of the heritors of three-quarters of the value of its land.<sup>14</sup> Given the authorities’ disinclination to rectify the situation, this measure effectively blocked any further reorganisation of the parish system across vast areas of the Gàidhealtachd. Recalcitrant heritors could have other more subtle weapons up their sleeves too: when the new cadre of ministers was settled in Wester Ross in the late 1720s, the local landowners refused to pay the stipends, threatening to lay the onus of paying the stipend upon the parishioners at large, thereby putting the clergy in a very invidious position.<sup>15</sup>

It is notable that the only parishes in the Gàidhealtachd which were eventually divided up during the early eighteenth century were either on estates forfeited from their previous episcopal or Catholic owners and run by government officials, or else, very infrequently, where the land was

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<sup>13</sup> NAS, CH1/2/59, fo. 259.

<sup>14</sup> APS, xi, 433.

<sup>15</sup> NAS, CH1/5/51, 182-3, 236.

owned outright by zealous heritors. The new parishes erected in Lewis in 1722, in Skye and the Small Isles in 1726, and in Wester Ross in 1727, could only be created because they were situated on the forfeited estates of Mackenzie of Seaforth, MacDonald of Sleat, MacDonald of Clan Ranald and Mackinnon of Strath, all of which were being administered for the government by the Barons of the Exchequer. Even so, the barons were far from happy with seeing what must have been a handy source of private revenue being creamed off by the church. With many estates being bought up by agents acting for the original owners, the church had to threaten legal action before the later batches of reorganisation were carried out. On the other hand, the disjunction of the island of Gigha was carried through by the principal landowner Neill MacNeill, while, on a rather larger scale, the extensive reorganisation of the parishes on Lord Reay's estate in the far north-west was solely due to Reay's enthusiasm for the presbyterian church, and his fervent and tireless lobbying of the commission of the General Assembly year after year.<sup>16</sup>

Most Highland proprietors, however, were somewhat less enthused with having to pay for new ministers. Again, the church, both at local and national level, was often none too keen on antagonising the leading men in the district, especially given that the latter often served as the ruling elders who accompanied their ministers to the General Assembly and so had an important voice in deciding church policy. The situation was even more delicate on the west coast, where the Synod of Argyll was permitted by acts of parliament of 1690 and 1696 to retain the monies due to ministers of unplanted parishes there – the “vacant stipends” – for its own use. Rather extraordinarily, it was thus in the synod's financial interest to keep these parishes without ministers, a fact which led to more than one clash with zealous local presbyteries.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> NAS, TE19/823; CH2/557/5, 178-9, 196, 242-3, 259-60, 267; W. R. Mackay, “Early evangelical religion in the far north: a *Kulturkampf*”, *RSCHS*, 26 (1996), 104-8, 118-26, 130, 132-4.

<sup>17</sup> *APS*, ix, 197-8, 365, 448; cf. vii, 478. In effect, the church court of the semi-independent Synod of Argyll can be seen as analogous to the duke of Argyll's heritable jurisdiction: cf. James A. Stewart, “The Clan Ranald and the Catholic missionary successes”, *IR*, 45 (1994), 43.

The problem remained of the sheer lack of Gaelic-speaking clergy in a region where few families were able to send their sons to university, let alone to study divinity. Although the church finally demanded that all presbyteries use their educational bursaries to finance “diverse hopeful youths” with Gaelic, Lowland clergy were understandably rather loath to pay for Gaels rather than their own sons. After a few years, the bursary system was full up.<sup>18</sup>

Even when Gaelic-speaking ministers were attached to Gaelic-speaking parishes, there was the matter of ensuring that they stayed with their flocks. Some Gàidhealtachd parishes, especially the many smaller ones in Argyll, were rather more attractive than others. There are a number of cases during the period when presbyteries complained that long-suffering ministers in the most demanding parishes in their bounds were – no doubt not unwillingly – poached by friends and sympathetic acquaintances in neighbouring presbyteries, and given easier flocks to care for.<sup>19</sup> To make matters worse, in 1716, in the aftermath of the recent jacobite rising, the General Assembly had once more ruled that ministers with Gaelic had to serve Gaelic-speaking parishes. Unable to cross the linguistic boundary, ministers were in effect trapped in the Gàidhealtachd. The Rev. John MacInnes for one certainly chafed at this restriction.<sup>20</sup> The corollary of this measure was that, with the exception of the Rev. Neil MacVicar of the West Bow, there were no Gaelic-speaking ministers in or around Edinburgh to participate in and influence church policy through the Commission and the various committees of the General Assembly, or indeed the SSPCK.

The troubles faced by the Church of Scotland in the Gàidhealtachd were certainly pressing. The ecclesiastical authorities received a steady stream of memorials from Highland presbyteries and synods bemoaning their grievances, their vast parishes, their unsympathetic heritors and the lack of support from central government and local magistrates. What made these particular problems a matter of national concern was a menace which had

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<sup>18</sup> NAS, CH1/3/19, 151, 195-8.

<sup>19</sup> *Fasti*, iv, 134, 136; vii, 147, 157.

<sup>20</sup> NAS, CH1/1/31, 110; CH1/2/53, fo. 223; Wodrow, *Correspondence* iii, 257, 258; Mary McHugh, “Kirk, state and the Catholic problem in the western Highlands of Scotland, 1690-1760” (Strathclyde University, M.Litt., 1982), 64-5.

been identified with the region for some time now, one particular complaint which was guaranteed an audience at the Assembly, a complaint which increasingly preoccupied the church's councils and would soon, for a brief while at least, focus the attention of the state as well: namely, the increase in Roman Catholicism, the so-called "growth of popery".

Anti-Catholicism was widespread, indeed universal, in English-speaking areas of the United Kingdom during the early modern era and beyond: "as integral a part of the nation's self-awareness as beer and roast-beef, and equally above reason"<sup>21</sup>; "a powerful cement between the English, the Welsh and the Scots, particularly lower down the social scale."<sup>22</sup> Periodic bursts of panic about the growth of popery were all too common in the early eighteenth century. Whether they were justified in a purely statistical sense is another matter. Certainly, there was a notable increase in the numbers of professing Roman Catholics in Scotland during the eighteenth century. However, the actual figures involved were extremely small, possibly growing from some six thousand at the end of the seventeenth century to over sixteen thousand in 1763 – still a mere two per cent of the Scottish population at the time.<sup>23</sup> But such statistics tend to hide crucial facts: firstly, that the growth was overwhelmingly in the Gàidhealtachd rather than in the Lowlands; and secondly, that rather than being a slow curve upwards, such increases inevitably took place in short bursts and in

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<sup>21</sup> Eamon Duffy, "'Poor protestant flies': conversions to Catholicism in early eighteenth-century England", in Derek Baker (ed), *Religious motivation: biographical and sociological problems for the church historian* (Studies in Church History, xv, Oxford, 1978), 289-90; cf. Colin Haydon, *Anti-Catholicism in eighteenth-century England, c.1714-80: a political and economic study* (Manchester, 1993), 1-116.

<sup>22</sup> Linda Colley, *Britons: forging the nation 1707-1837* (London, 1992), 23.

<sup>23</sup> Daniel Szechi, "Defending the True Faith: kirk, state, and Catholic missionaries in Scotland, 1653-1755", *Catholic Historical Review*, 82 (1996), 399; Fiona MacDonald, "Ireland and Scotland: historical perspectives on the Gaelic dimension 1560-1760" (Glasgow University, Ph.D., 1994), 591-5; McHugh, "Kirk, state and the Catholic problem", 21-4; Donald Maclean, *The Counter-Reformation in Scotland 1560-1930* (London, 1931), 206-7; Clotilde Prunier, "Catholiques, presbytériens, et enjeux de l'instruction dans les Highlands d'Écosse au dix-huitième siècle" (Université Stendhal, Grenoble III, Ph.D., 1996), 207-25.



individual districts as lay priests or jesuits entered new areas and began to make converts; and thirdly, that reports of even a handful of converts in a district could create a stir among the church authorities out of all proportion to the numbers involved. The early 1700s saw just such a phase, to be consolidated in the following generation. To the local presbyteries it must have seemed as if the world was turning upside down.

Since the beginning of the century the Catholic church in the Highlands had been revitalized, thanks in large measure to the foundations laid by Bishop Thomas Nicolson, first vicar-apostolic of Scotland. Nicolson had reinvigorated the mission, organising and consolidating its many different strands, doubling its finances, regularising contact with the authorities in Rome, establishing a national seminary to educate a native clergy, ensuring uniformity of doctrine and orienting the mission towards an evangelical stance rather than merely confirming the faithful.<sup>24</sup> The mission was further developed under the pious, inspiring but nonetheless somewhat unwordly leadership of Bishop James Gordon, though the decisive rôle played by priests on the continent, above all James Carnegie and the brothers Lewis and Thomas Innes, should not be neglected. In Scotland, the patronage and protection afforded to the Catholic church by Alexander, second duke of Gordon, was crucial, especially in his financing of the remote seminary of the Scalán in Gaelic-speaking Banffshire, where from 1716 boys were trained up for the priesthood.<sup>25</sup> An increasing number of zealous lay priests operating in the Gàidhealtachd were able to use local knowledge, family networks and indeed sympathy for or at least tolerance of local customs,

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<sup>24</sup> Wendy J. Doran, "Bishop Thomas Nicolson and the Roman Catholic mission to Scotland 1694-1718", (Glasgow University, M.Litt, 1986); eadem, "Bishop Thomas Nicolson: first Vicar-Apostolic, 1695-1718", *IR*, 39 (1988), 109-32; Peter F. Anson, *Underground Catholicism in Scotland 1622-1878* (Montrose, 1970), 92-114; Prunier, "Catholiques, presbytériens", 177-81.

<sup>25</sup> NLS, MS 68, fos. 31-2; MS 3430, fos. 239-40; NAS, GD44/40/8/56; Wodrow, *Analecta*, iii, 308-9; Odo Blundell, *The Catholic Highlands of Scotland* (Edinburgh, 1909), 1; Doran, "Bishop Thomas Nicolson and the Roman Catholic mission", 62, 98, 100, 102, 104-5; John Watts, *Scalán: the forbidden college, 1716-1799* (East Linton, 1999).

and indeed Gaelic culture, to win converts at all levels of society.<sup>26</sup> Children of mixed marriages were regularly brought up as Catholic.<sup>27</sup> This is not to overstress the success of the mission: far from being the lurid monolithic behemoth of presbyterian imagination, the church remained badly underfunded, and what few clergy there were were all too often exhausted and demoralised by their labours.<sup>28</sup> Nevertheless, with the crucial assistance of Catholic sympathisers among the local proprietors, and far removed from government control, the priests were holding their own in somewhat inaccessible areas in the western Gàidhealtachd such as the Rough Bounds, Uist and Barra.<sup>29</sup> On the other hand, successful new mission fields were being cultivated, most notably the parish of Kilmonivaig, where the Catholic mission was able to consolidate the major gains it had made at the beginning of the century, whilst fruitful possibilities appeared to be opening up in districts such as Kintail, easily accessible from Catholic Strathglass, then under jesuit supervision, and western Badenoch, then being infiltrated by Catholic MacDonalds who had moved from Brae Lochaber with the encouragement of the duke of Gordon.<sup>30</sup> The priests' task was possibly

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<sup>26</sup> Stewart, "Clan Ranald", 37, 39-44; Prunier, "Catholiques, presbytériens", 199-203; eadem, "Les catholiques en Écosse" in Pierre Morère (ed.), *Écosse des Lumières: le XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle autrement* (Grenoble, 1997), 107-8.

<sup>27</sup> Alasdair Roberts, "Catholic marriage in eighteenth-century Scotland", *IR*, 43 (1983), 12-13; Prunier, "Catholiques, presbytériens", 189-92.

<sup>28</sup> Doran, "Bishop Thomas Nicolson and the Roman Catholic mission", 79, 81, 83, 85-6, 135-9; eadem, "Bishop Thomas Nicolson, first vicar-apostolic", 123, 125; MacDonald, "Ireland and Scotland", 460-1; James F. McMillan, "Mission accomplished?: The Catholic underground", in T.M. Devine and J.R. Young (eds.), *Eighteenth century Scotland: New perspectives* (East Linton, 1999), 98-100, 102-4; Prunier, "Catholiques, presbytériens", 97-103, 108-15; Szechi, "Defending the True Faith", 405-11.

<sup>29</sup> Stewart, "Clan Ranald", 34, 37; McHugh, "Kirk, state and the Catholic problem", 101-2; McHugh, "Religious condition", 12; Prunier, "Catholiques, presbytériens", 92-6, 137-62, 193-4, 197.

<sup>30</sup> NAS, CH1/1/29, 155, 190-7; CH1/3/17, 506-7; CH1/5/119, 10; /51, 75; GD44/43/14/40; NLS, MS 3430, fos. 220, 228; McHugh, "Religious condition", 17-19, 20; McHugh, "Kirk, state and the Catholic problem", 26, 94, 95, 135-7, 139; MacDonald, "Ireland and Scotland", 585.

expedited by the passing away of the older episcopal ministers. Indeed, many of the new generation of episcopal preachers regarded Catholics as allies against an encroaching presbyterianism, the more so because both denominations were strongly linked with the jacobite cause.<sup>31</sup>

Catholicism and jacobitism were interchangeable in the eyes of the presbyterian church: "'Tis needless to observe that to make one a Papist, is to make him also a Jacobite."<sup>32</sup> James VII had been exiled for his championing of the Catholic cause, and his son, the titular James VIII, held to his father's religion, even if it cost him his throne. Despite the necessary caution shown by the Catholic hierarchy in Scotland towards political matters, the church on the continent cooperated closely with the Stuarts in securing financial aid, and in choosing bishops. In the missions themselves, the identity of the king for whom prayers were offered every mass was left delicately ambiguous, although members of the congregation might express their allegiance in rather more robust terms.<sup>33</sup> As the Church of Scotland was all too eager to stress in their official memorials to the government, Catholics were estranged from the protestant establishment. The growth of Roman Catholicism in the Gàidhealtachd was not just a threat to the Church of Scotland, but to the entire British state. The Presbytery of Lorn, in a memorial of 1722, appealed to the General Assembly thus:

We have long lyen under personal grievances but now the growth of Popery is like to turn dangerous to state & church it being certain that

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<sup>31</sup> NLS, MS 68 fos. 32r.-v.; MS 976 fo. 147; NAS, CH1/5/51, 139, 280-1; PRO, SP54/16/36C; Wodrow, *Analecta*, iii, 423-4; Ludwig Hammermayer "Zur Gesellschaftsstruktur und Rechtsstellung der Katholischen Minorität in Schottland (1560-1760)", in Ferdinand Seibt (ed.) *Gesellschaftsgeschichte: Festschrift für Karl Bosl zum 80. Geburtstag* (Munich, 1988), 149-50; McHugh, "Kirk, state and the Catholic problem", 44-5.

<sup>32</sup> NAS, CH1/3/17, 526.

<sup>33</sup> NAS, CH1/2/57, fo. 203v.; Doran, "Bishop Thomas Nicolson and the Roman Catholic mission", 123-8; Brian M. Halloran, *The Scots College Paris 1603-1792* (Edinburgh, 1997), 80-101; McHugh, "Kirk, state and the Catholic problem", 54-7; Prunier, "Catholiques, presbytériens", 116-31; eadem, "Les catholiques en Écosse", 111-12, 120.

every one that is brought over to Popery, is at the same time brought over to be an enemy to His Majesty King George, and the protestant succession in his royal family, upon the security whereof depends under God our most valuable libertys and privileges, sacred & civil.<sup>34</sup>

To the church at this time, Catholicism “appears to diffuse and spread itself so exceedingly, that if it be not timeously and effectually prevented, threatens the apostatizing of many unto Popery, to the great disturbance and danger of this National Church and the Protestant Succession”.<sup>35</sup>

Whether the authorities were prepared to take the necessary measures is another matter. The central government was rarely inclined to jeopardise the peace of the land through heavy-handed and ultimately counter-productive measures. Still less was the local magistracy – where there was an effective legal network in place – willing to put such procedures into effect against their compeers, relatives friends and neighbours. Periods of Catholic persecution there certainly were, and the penal laws, above all the act of 1700, remained a sword of Damocles hanging over Roman Catholics throughout the country. But generally a *via media* was maintained, a preference for compromise and mutual concessions.<sup>36</sup>

Following the failure of the 1715 jacobite rising, the Gàidhealtachd had been left as something of a power vacuum. The Independent Companies had been disbanded, and the legal apparatus of the region placed in the hands of Squadrone supporters. Despite the constant demands of the Church of Scotland that action be taken against the growth of popery, the authorities preferred to pursue a *laissez-faire* policy, being as a rule unwilling to attempt

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<sup>34</sup> NAS, CH1/3/17, 245.

<sup>35</sup> NAS, CH1/3/17, 35-6.

<sup>36</sup> Hammermayer, “Zur Gesellschaftsstruktur und Rechtsstellung der Katholischen Minorität”, 444, 449-53; cf. *APS*, x, 64, 208, 212, 215-19, app. 47-8; Peter F. Anson, *The Catholic church in modern Scotland 1560-1937* (London, 1937), 82-8; Doran, “Bishop Thomas Nicolson and the Roman Catholic mission”, 53-4, 82, 126; MacDonald, “Ireland and Scotland”, 567-9, 557, 583; McHugh, “Kirk, state and the Catholic problem”, 50, 67; Allan I. Macinnes, “Catholic recusancy and the penal laws”, *RSCHS*, 23 (1989), 59-63; Prunier, “Catholiques, presbytériens”, 48-55; eadem, “Les catholiques en Écosse”, 127-8, 134.



to put the penal laws into general effect, and thus to exacerbate matters in an already somewhat recalcitrant region. Priests could still preach and convert, whilst Catholic heirs could be educated in the faith of their fathers and succeed to their estates. The situation was especially difficult for presbyterian clergy who ministered in areas dominated by Catholic magnates, especially in the great swathe of estates where the duke of Gordon was superior, or else dwelt far from the legal authorities who might perhaps be goaded into taking action against local Catholics.<sup>37</sup>

As well as presbyterians and Catholics, there remained of course a sizable, albeit declining, episcopalian presence in the Gàidhealtachd. The desperate paucity of surviving archive material, the reluctance of the General Assembly to highlight complaints against episcopalianism in their memorials to the London authorities, and the recent dwindling of an indigenous Highland episcopalian tradition make it easy to ignore its survival and even renewed missionary activity during this period.<sup>38</sup> It must be stressed that a simple presbyterian-Catholic dichotomy cannot adequately describe the ecclesiastical situation in the Gàidhealtachd in the early eighteenth century. As shall be seen, the passing away of the last generation of episcopalian ministers in Mackenzie territories in Ross afforded the Church of Scotland the opportunity to make spectacular gains. Indeed, throughout the Gàidhealtachd it was the struggle against episcopalian ministers rather than Catholic priests which radicalised local presbyterian clergy, and thus shaped the future course of Highland evangelism.

Nevertheless, there is a caveat concerning phenomena such as “the growth of popery”, the survival of episcopalianism, or indeed the growth of presbyterianism itself during this period. What exactly did such ideological commitment mean to the people of the Gàidhealtachd in the early eighteenth century? Given the tiny number of clergy of all denominations ministering across a huge, far-flung region to a scattered population, given the lack of a settled local ministry and a comprehensive

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<sup>37</sup> NLS, MS 3430 fos. 220v., 234-5; Mary McHugh, “Religious condition”, 12-13.

<sup>38</sup> For contemporary schism in the episcopalian church, see Daniel Szechi, *The letters of George Lockhart of Carnwath 1698-1732* (Edinburgh, Scottish History Society, 1989), xxxiii, 182-4, 192-3, 196-201.

system of church- or indeed state-funded parochial schools and catechists, most Gaels were simply not exposed to matters of religious dogma, nor did they particularly care. Rather, what most people wanted of any man of God was that he marry them, comfort them when sick, bury them, and, above all, that he baptize their children, so that if a child died early, he or she could be buried with a name in a churchyard. According to the Rev. William Barron, minister at Glenlivet in 1728, “Popish Midwives are not a litle ensnareing, useing their Influence in times of women’s labour, and when Children are brought forth, if a Minr is not presently at hand, these press the calling for or sending the Children to a Priest to be baptised.”<sup>39</sup> Writing in 1724, Colin Mackenzie of Coul retails the following anecdote concerning Rev. Donald MacLeod of Contin:

My Minister would needs goe to the Isles to see his father & as he’s goeing throw our Western hills the news of a minr’s passing throw Spread among the people & immediately ther came upon him six men in Armes who attacqu’d him roughly but the plot was a fellow ther that wanted to get a bastard bairn Christen’d and his termes of Capitulation were that Mr McLeod should Christen the Child which being done the men put on anoyr humour intertain’d the Minr very kindly & convey’d him out off hazard.<sup>40</sup>

Most people, it appears, were prepared to pray with priests and ministers alike.<sup>41</sup> Neither side could let this state of affairs continue. Religious education was the key. The Church of Scotland laid increasing stress on catechising and educating the people of the Gàidhealtachd in the presbyterian faith, the aim being a rising generation of literate Gaels, fluent in English, led by a cadre of educated and ideologically-motivated Gaelic

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<sup>39</sup> NAS, CH1/2/57, fo. 203; cf. also CH1/2/51, 299; /70, fo. 289; CH1/5/51, 68-9, 425; CH2/557/4, 8; SCA, BL1/99/2; 2/295/2; CC1/8, 310-11; NLS, MS 1389 fo. 86; John MacInnes, “Baptism in the Highlands”, *RCHS*, 13 (1959), 8-9, 12-15, 16-18; Prunier, “Catholiques, presbytériens”, 182-5, 219-21.

<sup>40</sup> NAS, CH1/2/66, fo. 98.

<sup>41</sup> NAS, CH1/5/119, 2; cf. CH1/5/51, 459-60.

preachers. Although the Catholic church did not lay the same stress on literacy, it is clear that there was a similar, albeit not so well documented, drive among mission priests and laypeople to bring up young people in their own faith. There was thus a polarizing of religion during this period, a time when confessional allegiances were growing increasingly important, when fundamental choices were having to be taken.<sup>42</sup>

The Church of Scotland during the early 1720s thus found itself in an impasse. Although some new parishes were in the process of being created, there were no fresh funds for either educating Gaelic-speaking ministers or despatching assistant ministers to parishes in the Gàidhealtachd. At the same time, there was a marked lack of government support, let alone cooperation from local magistrates.

### **The political background**

In the aftermath of the union of parliaments in 1707, power and patronage in Scottish politics were bitterly fought over by two groupings of whig politicians: on the one hand, the so-called Argathelians under the leadership of John Campbell, second duke of Argyll, and his brother Archibald, earl of Ilay; on the other, the set of politicians nicknamed the Squadrone, under John Ker, first duke of Roxburgh. Although the Argathelians were in the ascendancy at the time of the 1715 jacobite rising, the leniency Argyll, as commander-in-chief of the forces in Scotland, showed towards the defeated jacobites, and his reluctance to wreak vengeance upon them, proved to be the downfall of his interest. Such policies may have been popular in Scotland, but they allowed his political enemies in London to accuse him of cowardice and even of covertly favouring the Stuart cause. Although these charges were of course quite unjust, they had the desired effect: Argyll, after falling out with the king himself, was disgraced and, together with his brother, stripped of official posts. The Squadrone, meanwhile, had backed the punitive measures taken against the rebels by the English

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<sup>42</sup> SCA, CC1/10, 814-15; Dorrian, "Hugh MacDonald", 89-101; McHugh, "Kirk, state and the Catholic problem", 67, 78-9, 83-5; Prunier, "Catholiques, presbytériens", 252-7, 271-7, 282-4, 309-18, 320-3.

ministry, and so Roxburgh, with the favour of George I, became Secretary of State for Scotland.<sup>43</sup>

However, the Squadrone ascendancy in Scotland was to prove short-lived, primarily because of a contest for power between English whig ministers. It was not long before their English sponsors, the earls of Stanhope and Sunderland, were plunged into the South Sea Bubble crisis. Beset by allegations of corruption and mismanagement, with public and private finances alike devastated, Stanhope died from the strain in February 1721. He was replaced as Secretary of State by his rival, Charles, viscount Townshend. Two months later his erstwhile colleague Sunderland was forced to resign from the Treasury, making way for Robert Walpole. In the wake of these major changes of government in London, the structure, administration, personnel and policies of the Scottish political world would be transformed as well.<sup>44</sup>

With the exception of John, earl of Sutherland, very few of the major adherents of the Squadrone came from the Gàidhealtachd. Indeed, the grouping had no clear positive policies towards the region, other than heavy-handed reprisals, and depriving Argyll of opportunities for patronage among his allies there – hence the disbanding the Independent Highland Companies in 1717, a miscalculation leading to further disorder in a region already slipping from control following the “monumental blunder” of the scrapping of the Privy Council in 1708. The abortive 1719 rising, violent resistance to government troops on the forfeited Seaforth estate in Wester Ross, and a series of depredations culminating in the murder of fourteen soldiers in Lochaber in November 1720 made Roxburgh think again about the

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<sup>43</sup> Riley, *English ministers and Scotland*, 263-7; Scott, “Politics and administration of Scotland”, 305-6; Wehrli, “Scottish politics”, 14, 109-12, 125, 130, 174, 178-81.

<sup>44</sup> Ragnhild Hatton, *George I: elector and king* (London, 1978), 247-56; Riley, *English ministers and Scotland*, 269-70; Wehrli, “Scottish politics”, 15; Elizabeth K. Carmichael, “Jacobitism in the Scottish Commission of the Peace, 1707-60”, *SHR*, lviii (1979), 61-3.



Independent Companies. But financial chaos in the aftermath of the South Sea Bubble meant that Scottish affairs took a back seat at Westminster.<sup>45</sup>

### Church initiatives in the early 1720s

In the aftermath of the 1719 jacobite rising, the Church of Scotland lobbied the government to take action in the Gàidhealtachd. Ministers and elders were spurred on, and indeed shocked, by the distressing reports of various church courts in the region, above all the evangelically-minded, vociferous and occasionally somewhat artless Presbytery of Skye, whose bounds included all the Hebrides north of Ardnamurchan. At that time, taking advantage of the forfeiture of the jacobite estates, the presbytery was erecting new parishes in Lewis, Skye and the Small Isles, a rather delicate procedure involving a great deal of assiduous lobbying. Indeed, much of the impetus for the great changes in church government in the mid-1720s would originate in its initiatives.<sup>46</sup>

The 1722 General Assembly further considered the anti-papist memorials recently handed in. The two most noteworthy recommendations made to the Commission concerned lobbying for a public subvention, namely that they should “as they see cause to Address the Government for a suitable ffund yearly During His Majestie’s pleasure for mentaining more Preachers And also Catechists for travelling through the foresaid Countries [Roman Catholic areas], And for defraying the expences of Processes that may be found needful for suppressing of Popery And preventing the farder growth

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<sup>45</sup> Allan I. Macinnes, *Clanship, commerce and the House of Stuart, 1603-1788* (East Linton, 1996), 193-7; Mitchison, “The government and the Highlands”, in N.T. Phillipson and Rosalind Mitchison, *Scotland in the Age of Improvement* (Edinburgh, 1970), 31-2; Wehrli, “Scottish politics”, 47-50, 111-12; cf. NRA(S), 0909, bundle 306.

<sup>46</sup> NAS, CH1/1/27, 322, 363-6, 403-4, 429; /29, 26-32, 89-90, 154-5, 162-6; CH1/3/15, 250-1, 257, 265, 268-70, 282, 283-4, 318, 320, 336, 417-18; /17, 18, 22-3, 31, 33-4, 34-47, 64, 81, 109-20, 149, 160, 164, 168-80, 309; NLS, MS 68, fos. 31-2; MS 3430, fos. 220-1, 228-9, 232-5; cf. Wodrow, *Correspondence*, ii, 529-30, 583-4, 586; Anne Skoczylas, *Mr Simson’s knotty case: divinity, politics and due process in early eighteenth-century Scotland* (Montreal, 2001), 324-5.

thereof<sup>47</sup>; and also that the church make a survey of the bursaries available to each synod, in order that they might be used for Gaelic-speaking students.

While attending the 1722 assembly, ministers were astonished by the sensational news of the discovery of the Atterbury Plot, so called because of the key rôle played in it by Francis Atterbury, bishop of Rochester. King George I was to be murdered as he journeyed from London to his native Hanover, and an invasion would be launched by exiled Irish officers under the jacobite hero James Butler, duke of Ormonde. Government ministers were to be arrested and held in the Tower, while jacobites would seize the Bank of England and the Royal Exchange. The plot was discovered and its progress monitored by Robert Walpole's extensive spy network. Certain coded letters referred to a lame spotted dog called Harlequin. The dog really existed, was owned by Atterbury, and thus the conspirators were revealed.<sup>48</sup>

Although only one man was executed after the plot was discovered – Atterbury himself spent the rest of his life in exile – it had clearly alarmed the political establishment. At the same time, the authorities, above all Walpole, were perfectly aware of the political advantages to be gained from skilfully and ruthlessly exploiting such fears, demoralising and smearing the opposition, and so rallying the nation to the Hanoverian cause. Habeas Corpus was suspended. The Roman Catholics of England were made scapegoats, and a swingeing £10,000 fine was laid upon the entire English Catholic community. For nearly two years the government filled

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<sup>47</sup> NAS, CH1/3/17, 241; cf. CH1/1/29, 195-6, 203-4, 222-30; Wodrow, *Correspondence*, ii, 649-50.

<sup>48</sup> G.V. Bennett, *The tory crisis in church and state 1688-1720: the career of Francis Atterbury, bishop of Rochester* (Oxford, 1975), 223-75; Paul S. Fritz, *The English ministers and jacobitism between the rebellions of 1715 and 1745* (Toronto, 1975), 67-80; J.H. Plumb, *Sir Robert Walpole: the king's minister* (London, 1960), 40-9; Ragnild Hatton, *George I: elector and king* (London, 1978), 256-7; cf. Wodrow, *Correspondence*, ii, 643-4, 648.

the news-sheets with lurid details of the plot.<sup>49</sup> The discovery of the conspiracy would bear upon North Britain as well.

At their November sitting the Commission composed an address to the king “upon occasion of the happie discovery of the Late wicked Conspiracy against His Royal Person and Family”.<sup>50</sup> The following day letters were written to Roxburgh and the Lord Advocate, reminding them of the address of the previous General Assembly to King George, and the memorials therewith concerning the growth of popery. In a letter to the king himself, the church rather sleekitly prided itself on not having any disaffected persons in its midst, unlike the Church of England.<sup>51</sup> In March 1723 Roxburgh informed the Commission that he had finally laid the memorials before the king.<sup>52</sup> However, at the General Assembly that May the church pitched upon a number of far-reaching measures of its own.

The King’s address to the General Assembly of 1723, delivered by his representative the Lord High Commissioner, repeatedly refers to “the late horrid Conspiracy” against himself and the protestant religion which providence alone had averted. The speeches by the moderator and the Commissioner himself are of the same tenor. The General Assembly passed a whole raft of anti-Catholic enactments, and renewed similar motions passed by previous Assemblies. Measures were to be taken against Catholic schools and meeting-houses, while the church was to consult with the Lord Advocate in order to decided how best to further the prosecution of priests and non-juring ministers by encouraging, or threatening, local magistrates to take action.<sup>53</sup> The discovery of the nefarious Atterbury Plot seems to

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<sup>49</sup> Fritz, *English ministers and jacobitism*, 3-7, 81-108; Jeremy Black, *Walpole in power* (Stroud, 2001), 25-7, 44; Haydon, *Anti-Catholicism*, 120-4; Alphons Bellesheim, *History of the Catholic church of Scotland*, trans. David Oswald Hunter (4 vols., Edinburgh, 1887-90) iv, 185-6, 377-80; William Forbes Leith, *Memoirs of Scottish Catholics during the XVII<sup>th</sup> and XVIII<sup>th</sup> centuries* (London, 1909) ii, 292-4; SCA, CC1/10, 811-13.

<sup>50</sup> NAS, CH1/3/17, 271.

<sup>51</sup> NAS, CH1/3/17, 274, 276-9.

<sup>52</sup> NAS, CH1/3/17, 283-4.

<sup>53</sup> NAS, CH1/1/29, 307-9, 315-18, 354, 356; cf. SP54/14/13, /18A, /18B; Wodrow, *Correspondence*, iii, 43-4.

have spurred the church to action, not only to recommend general measures, but also to take specific steps to combat Catholicism, above all in the Gàidhealtachd.

On the 20 May 1723 the General Assembly considered another proposal, namely the creation of a new Synod of Glenelg which would include much of the north-west seaboard, the northern Hebrides and Lochaber. The reason given for so doing was “the Greatness of Ministerial Charges in diverse places, the Want of Schools, the long Vacancy of some Churches, And the vast distance that Ministers have to travel to Synods and Presbyteries, whereby when they do attend the same, they are much diverted from their parochial Work and from watching over their flocks, and guarding their people against the poisonous influence of Popish Emissaries and other persons disaffected to Our happie Establishment”.<sup>54</sup> The neighbouring presbyteries and synods were asked to forward their own recommendations, and the Commission of the General Assembly was to prepare a report for the next year’s Assembly. It is notable that this plan appears to have been drawn up during the General Assembly itself, being suggested by neither the Commission nor the presbyteries.

In addition, the committee appointed to consider the growth of popery was particularly referred “to pitch upon fit persons to travel as Preachers and Catechists in the Bounds of the Presbytery of Strathbogie, Abernethie and Lorn And to address the Government for a suitable Fund yearly during His Majestie’s pleasure for maintaining Preachers and Catechists in Countreys where Popery abounds”, as well as to get monies for defraying the cost of creating new parishes.<sup>55</sup>

Bursaries were finally fixed for Gaelic-speaking students, although problems arose with the candidates who applied: the synod of James Anderson, schoolmaster in Hawick, preferred to retain him in his present employment, as he had “such an Aversion to, and unfitness for performing in publick, as seem’d to them to be very inherent in his temper and constitution”; on the other hand, the bursary of Aeneas Sage from Tarbat

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<sup>54</sup> NAS, CH1/1/29, 354.

<sup>55</sup> NAS, CH1/3/17, 317.



was withdrawn after it was discovered that he did “head a furious Jacobite Mob in the College of Aberdeen” during the 1715 rising.<sup>56</sup>

In March 1724 the large committee appointed by the previous year’s General Assembly to consider ways of preventing the growth of popery had finally compiled their report. Its major recommendation was that a suitable yearly fund should be supplied “for maintaining Preachers and Catechists in Countreys where Popery abounds and defraying the Charges of Processes that may be needful for suppressing Popery and preventing the Growth thereof”.<sup>57</sup> An address to the king was prepared, in which it was requested that he bestow a suitable annual fund from out of the Royal Bounty “Toward the Assissting the Ministers of this Church in instructing the People in the Knowledge of the Protestant Religion, Preventing the Growth of Popery and Recovering such as have been misled by Popish Emissaries and for maintaining more Preachers and Catechists to travel Through the foresaid Countreys where Popery so much prevails”, as well as to further any ecclesiastical processes needful to hinder Catholic missions.<sup>58</sup>

### **1724-5: The genesis of the Royal Bounty**

Two months later, the following General Assembly put into operation far-reaching and extraordinary changes to the framework of church government: on 19 May 1724 three new presbyteries were formally constituted, and a new Synod of Glenelg erected to oversee the entire north-west coast and northern Hebrides. The plan was further refined nearly two years later, on 16 February 1726, when three new parishes were disjoined in Skye and the Small Isles.<sup>59</sup> At a General Assembly meeting of 11 May 1726 a new Presbytery of Tongue was authorised, supervising new parishes carved out

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<sup>56</sup> NAS, CH1/3/17, 122, 150, 156, 311, 320, 325-6, 328, 408-9; cf. NLS, MS 3430, fo. 262v.; CH2/312/2, 137, 153, 174-5, 197, 242-3, 262-3.

<sup>57</sup> NAS, CH1/3/17, 358.

<sup>58</sup> NAS, CH1/3/17, 359-60.

<sup>59</sup> NAS, CH1/1/29, 26-32, 162-6, 276-8, 354-5, 418-24, 432-3; cf. Forbes Leith, *Memoirs*, ii, 295-6; Ferguson, “The problems of the established church”, 22-3.

of the huge parish of Durness under the patronage of Lord Reay.<sup>60</sup> We should also note that other parts of the Gàidhealtachd and indeed the Northern Isles shared in such reorganisation: in 1725 a new Presbytery of Caithness and Synod of Orkney were created, while, in the eastern Gàidhealtachd, the Presbytery of Aberlour was refounded in 1727, eight years after its original dissolution.<sup>61</sup> On 12 May 1726, the Synod of Argyll had taken unilateral action in creating a new Presbytery of Mull out of the western parishes of the Presbytery of Lorn, an alteration taken without the permission of the General Assembly, and only discovered, much to their disapproval, when the synod record book was examined two years later.<sup>62</sup>

The 1724 General Assembly did not stop at creating a new ecclesiastical structure in the Highlands. It was agreed to use money left by the wealthy John Raining to build a school for Gaelic-speaking boys in an English environment, a project which was realised with the opening of Raining's School, under the auspices of the SSPCK, in Inverness.<sup>63</sup> On the final day of the assembly, the church took the step of recommending that preachers and catechists be recruited and sent to the outspoken presbyteries of Strathbogie, Abernethy and Lorn, all areas where Roman Catholicism was apparently thriving. Each catechist would be paid a salary of 400 merks a year out of the church's money. The importance attached to the measure is clear: its funds were given priority over all other ecclesiastical accounts apart from the church's own annual charges. The General Assembly of 1724 had thus demonstrated its manifest willingness to shoulder the burdens of preaching in the north. In his closing speech, the moderator made the pointed recommendation to the Lord High Commissioner, the earl of Findlater, "That effectual methods, which His Majesty in His Great Wisdom

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<sup>60</sup> NAS, CH1/1/29, 128-32, 253, 357, 405-6, 513-14, 554; CH1/1/31, 47-9; CH1/2/53, fo. 221; Wodrow, *Correspondence*, ii, 579; *Fasti*, vii, 101, 104, 109.

<sup>61</sup> *Fasti*, vi, 334; vii, 112, 210, 234.

<sup>62</sup> NAS, CH1/1/31, 439; CH1/3/19, 231; cf. CH1/2/55, fo. 223; /59, fos. 126-7; CH2/557/5, 356-8; /6, 13-14, 19.

<sup>63</sup> NAS, CH1/1/29, 444-7; GD95/1/2, 305-13, 421-8; /2/3, 266-9, 281-2, 338-9, 404-5; /1/3, 17-18, 100-1; /2/4, 6-7, 22-3, 105; Wodrow, *Analecta*, iii, 357; Durkacz, *The decline of the Celtic languages*, 58-9; Thomas M. Murchison, "Raining's School: a seed-bed of talent", *TGSI*, 52 (1980-2), 411-12.

will find out, may be taken for suppressing the Great and Lamentable Growth of Popery". In his reply, the earl promised to take the church's recommendations into account.<sup>64</sup>

It is clear from Findlater's letters to Charles Townshend in London that the church was quietly canvassing official support for even more ambitious plans. Writing on 7 May, before the Assembly has begun, Findlater tells Townshend, who took a special interest in church affairs and certainly approved, how:

the Moderator and several Ministers of the Commission of the Last Assembly did this day deliver me a copie of the adress the Commissioners presented to the King by the D. of Roxburgh by which they desir His Majesty may alou a soum of money yearly out of the fonds of the Civil List here for providing Ministers they think it necessary to be sent to assist in the Large parishes in the Highlands and Islands Where there are great numbers of papists and Popish priests if I could obtain a favourable ansuer it woud pleas them very much they say the Kings Advocat hes spoak of this to Mr Walpole and that He finds him inclined to favour them in it I promised to apply to Your Lo and Mr Walpole and I have also writt a short Letter to him they will belive me negligent if neither Your Lop or he accknowledge that I have made this application and it woud give me interest with them if they succeed the soum they propose is five hundred pound Yearly I beg pardon for this trouble and belive me to be with the greatest respect...<sup>65</sup>

Despite the reorganisation of 1724, new synods and presbyteries on their own would not be sufficient. As far as the ecclesiastical sphere was concerned, the problem lay at parish level; in vast, far-flung parishes, ministers would require assistant preachers to share the workload.

The church was taking no risks. Its petition had previously been presented to the duke of Roxburgh, the "Scottish" Secretary of State, leader of the Squadrone and the most powerful magnate in Scotland at the time.

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<sup>64</sup> NAS, CH1/1/29, 444-7, 476, 484, 486; cf. CH1/2/53, fo. 204.

<sup>65</sup> PRO, SP54/14/28; cf. SP56/1, 1; *HMC 14<sup>th</sup> Report part III*, 227-8.

Since the last assembly in 1723, however, Roxburgh had been outmanoeuvred by his enemies and was now effectively sidelined from Scottish politics. The petition had thus been presented once again, this time to the men who had by now taken over the administration and patronage of Scottish politics, namely Townshend and Walpole.

The following month yet another request for assistance was made via Findlater to Charles Townshend, spurring that minister to make enquiries of his own and to commission a report on the Highlands of Scotland from the Lord Justice Clerk James Erskine, Lord Grange. However, pressing legal business meant that Grange was unable to begin to put together his proposals until the end of the year.<sup>66</sup> It was not long, however, before another somewhat sinister figure had presented his own memorial on the Gàidhealtachd. Ever on the lookout for the main chance, Simon Fraser, Lord Lovat, quickly compiled a brief punchy series of recommendations for various legal and military schemes which attracted government attention. As a result, on 3 July 1724 Major-General George Wade was despatched to Scotland, supposedly to inspect the military state of the Gàidhealtachd, but in actual fact on a highly secret mission to see how far Lovat's report tallied with reality. Wade spent the rest of 1724 travelling around and investigating the region; on his return to London, on 10 December, he presented his own paper, discussing clanship, cattle-thieving, and the need for the government to extend the system of state justice into the Highlands. He recommended the reestablishment of the Independent Companies – the local police (and spy) forces; the disarming of the people of the region; and the creation of a series of barracks through the Great Glen linked by a system of roads and bridges to allow regular troops easier access into the heart of the Gàidhealtachd. The overall tenor of Wade's report was conciliatory, stressing the need to reshape the personnel and mechanisms of authority in the region, and advocating a policy of cooperation with the clans rather than the repression still favoured by many throughout Britain. Wade's opinions were therefore on a par with those of Lovat, and the later, although apparently still influential, proposals of Lord Grange. The government evidently welcomed the general's suggestions, and a fortnight

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<sup>66</sup> PRO, SP54/14/35, /15/13; NAS, GD124/15/1248, /1262-4.



later he was appointed Commander-in-Chief of the army in Scotland. Wade continued to refine his plans, and left London for Scotland in June 1725.<sup>67</sup>

The year 1724 thus sees the instigation of an active interventionist government policy towards the Gàidhealtachd, a policy which can only be understood with reference to the contemporary political background. Walpole and Townshend were in the process of taking over the administration of Scotland, sidelining Roxburgh's Squadrone and relying upon Argathelian support, indeed adopting Argathelian policies. Among these policies was active engagement with the Gàidhealtachd. However, such reform and pacification as they envisaged could not be accomplished through military and political measures alone. The Church of Scotland would have a crucial rôle to play.

It is clear that Walpole and Townshend, urged by the briefings of Lovat and Grange, soon came to be convinced that the best way to ensure long-term security in the Gàidhealtachd was to follow a proactive policy, to engage with its people – with a firm hand, of course – through launching and supporting a range of political, military, commercial, ecclesiastical and educational initiatives in order to integrate the region with the rest of the country. Such an approach, of course, appealed to Argathelian politicians, especially to those with estates in the Gàidhealtachd who stood to profit from such projects, and from the prolonged peace and patronage which would surely follow in their wake. Indeed, it was partly due to their advocacy of such policies that the duke and his supporters had fallen from grace in 1716.<sup>68</sup>

Continued lobbying by the earl of Findlater and Principal Wishart in London over the spring of 1725 paid off<sup>69</sup>: at that year's General Assembly the surprise centrepiece of the speech by the king's representative – the prominent Argathelian the earl of Loudon – was a new source of income

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<sup>67</sup> PRO, SP54/14/36-7; /19/55; /15/89; NLS, MS Adv. 17.1.21; MS 2200, fos. 59-64; MS 5072 fo. 180; *HMC Townshend, 11<sup>th</sup> Report part IV*, 194-5; J.B. Salmond, *Wade in Scotland* (Edinburgh, 1938), 35-50; Mitchison, "The government and the Highlands", 32-4; Black, *Walpole in power*, 155.

<sup>68</sup> Wehrli, "Scottish politics", 67-73, 170.

<sup>69</sup> NAS, CH1/3/17, 451; SP54/15/89.

from official funds: namely, a thousand pounds out of the civil list, the Royal Bounty, “for the provision and entertainment of ... itinerant ministers & catechists” in order “to put some stop to the spreading ignorance and profanness on the one hand, and the trafficking of Popish priests and emissaries on the other, in the Highlands and Islands”.<sup>70</sup> The Church enthusiastically welcomed this major policy initiative, “the most important affair before the Assembly”.<sup>71</sup> A Committee for the Management of His Majesty’s Royal Bounty was constituted in order to appoint suitable preachers and catechists, and to decide where to send them. These tasks would be undertaken in conjunction with the presbyteries of the relevant bounds, who would certify and supervise the catechists, and with the committee of the SSPCK, many of whom would be the most zealous attenders of the Royal Bounty Committee.<sup>72</sup>

The year 1725 was thus a momentous one in the history of the Gàidhealtachd. But the granting of a thousand pounds of Royal Bounty, and Wade’s subsequent mission north to disarm the clans, can again only properly be understood when set against the wider sphere of international politics. At the beginning of the year war with Spain appeared imminent, and a fresh jacobite rising in the Scottish Highlands was widely expected.<sup>73</sup> Wade’s mission to the Gàidhealtachd was an attempt to fend off that possibility by imposing military and legal authority on a region once more threatened – for the third time in ten years – with foreign invasion. Even though the overall effectiveness of his disarming strategy might be doubted – the general himself admitted of the weapons surrendered “for the most part they are of little use but to be employ’d as old Iron”<sup>74</sup> – Wade nevertheless succeeded brilliantly in the main aims of his mission, winning

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<sup>70</sup> NAS, CH1/1/29, 499-500; cf. Wodrow, *Correspondence*, iii, 191-2, 193, 194, 207, 208.

<sup>71</sup> Wodrow, *Analecta*, iii, 195.

<sup>72</sup> PRO, SP54/15/20.

<sup>73</sup> Bennett, *Tory crisis*, 284-91; Fritz, *English ministers and jacobitism*, 127-34; *HMC Townshend*, 119; James Allardyce (ed.), *Historical papers relating to the jacobite period 1699-1750* (Aberdeen, New Spalding Club, 1895), 151-8.

<sup>74</sup> PRO, SP54/16/58; cf. NLS, MS 1334 fo. 92v.

over recalcitrant Highland gentry with an astute mixture of charm, cajoling and menace.<sup>75</sup> At the same time on the continent, Walpole's spy network was involved in a related but much more covert operation, stealthily suborning the jacobite chiefs in exile, winning them over with a mixture of bribes and promises of restoration to their forfeited estates. Despite last-ditch jacobite attempts to urge resistance, the clans and their chiefs had no choice but to come to terms with the London government.<sup>76</sup> By the end of the year, the Gàidhealtachd was the most peaceful it had been in living memory, with Wade writing to the duke of Newcastle that "the Highlanders instead of Guns, Broad Swords, Durks and Pistolls are now reduced to travell to their Fairs and Marketts with only a Staff in their hand."<sup>77</sup>

The authorities' policy towards the Gàidhealtachd can be regarded as part of a new government strategy for Scotland as a whole, in which Walpole and Townshend took the distribution of official Scottish patronage into their own hands and imposed direct rule as far as possible, thus following official parliamentary policy to remove opportunities for "contention for

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<sup>75</sup> PRO, SP54/15/67, /70, /73, /77, /81-2; /16/1B, /3, /12, /14, /28, /32-4, /46, /52, /58-9, /64, /66-7, /70; *HMC 14<sup>th</sup> Report part III*, 228; NLS, MS 1334, fos. 69v., 75-7, 79-80.

<sup>76</sup> PRO, SP54/16/74; Anon., *The private correspondence of Dr Francis Atterbury, Bishop of Rochester, and his friends, in 1725* ([London], 1768); Wodrow, *Analecta*, iii, 231-3, 318-19; *Culloden papers* (London, 1815), 103-4; Fritz, *English ministers and jacobitism*, 109-25; Black, *Walpole in power*, 68-9; Bennett, *Tory crisis*, 287-8; Bruce P. Lenman, "A client society: Scotland between the '15 and the '45", in Jeremy Black (ed.), *Britain in the age of Walpole* (Basingstoke, 1984), 87; cf. MS 1008 fos. 34v., 42v.-43r., 43v.-44v.; MS 1334 fo. 85; Szechi, *Letters of George Lockhart of Carnwath*, xxxiii-xxxiv, 226-303 passim.

<sup>77</sup> PRO, SP54/16/52.

power". In effect they were integrating the country's government with that of England.<sup>78</sup>

Given the popularity of Argyll's Argathelians, widely perceived as the patriotic party prepared to defend Scotland's interests, and given the duke's personal support among Scottish MP's, men bound to him by ties of blood, friendship and patronage, it made political sense for Walpole and Townshend to court the Argathelians rather than rely upon Roxburgh's Squadrone. Roxburgh was thus sidelined from Scottish politics, his Squadrone allies stripped of their powers at the end of May 1725, while he himself was dismissed in August 1725. But there was no intention of setting up Argyll as new master of Scotland in his place. Walpole's primary aim was to avoid faction in government. In North Britain, that meant the dismantling of any independent power-base in the country which might serve as a focus of opposition. The duke of Argyll was comprehensively outmanoeuvred over the malt tax riots in the Lowlands, and the management of Scotland placed in the hands of his brother the earl of Ilay, and his protege Andrew Fletcher, lord Milton. In effect, a new political order had begun, under which the government of Scotland was absorbed into that of England.<sup>79</sup>

However, such reform as they envisaged could not be accomplished through military and legal measures alone. The process had to include an ideological side, in which the authorities could reach out to win hearts and minds, not to mention souls. By careful and persistent lobbying, the Church of Scotland persuaded the government that it could play a crucial rôle in

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<sup>78</sup> Scott, "Politics and administration of Scotland", 2-4, 13-124, 318-25; Wehrli, "Scottish politics", 7-8, 73-7, 86-9; John M. Simpson, "Who steered the gravy train, 1707-1766?", in Phillipson and Mitchison (eds.), *Scotland in the Age of Improvement*, 48-50, 53-5; Carmichael, "Jacobitism in the Scottish Commission of the Peace", 63-4; cf. SP54/15/73, /78C; William Coxe, *Memoirs of the life and administration of Sir Robert Walpole, earl of Orford* (London, 1798) ii, 443, 448-50, 451-3; Wodrow, *Analecta*, iii, 436-7. For the analogous case of London, cf. Nicolas Rogers, "Resistance to oligarchy: the city opposition to Walpole and his successors", in John Stevenson (ed.), *London in the age of reform* (Oxford, 1977), 2-6.

<sup>79</sup> Scott, "Politics and administration of Scotland", 301, 325-57, 359, 367; Wehrli, "Scottish politics", 46, 78-9, 106-13, 143, 150-4, 167-73, 212-17; Wodrow, *Analecta*, iii, 209-10, 226-7.



this. The Royal Bounty scheme was thus complementary to official strategy, an “incorporative drive” to encourage Gaels to be loyal to the presbyterian church, the government, and the Hanoverian succession by weaning them away from the ever-present dangers of Catholicism and jacobitism. Although primarily aimed at the younger generation, it was hoped that the lessons learnt would percolate upwards to parents, older siblings and neighbours. Through inculcating values of industry and thrift, the project was also intended to enable a systematic exploitation of the commercial opportunities of the land they lived in. Gaels would thus become useful and obedient subjects of the British state.

### 1725: confused beginnings

On 18 May 1725, the day after the end of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, the Committee for the Reforming of the Highlands and Islands and the Management of the King’s Royal Bounty had its first meeting. Their task was as follows:

to Appoint Itinerant Preachers and Catechists to go to the proper places designed in His Majestie’s Warrant; And for that end they are carefully to inform themselves of the fit places where the said Itinerant Preachers are to be sent and employ’d, And of persons duly qualify’d for that Service, of good Abilities for the same, of a pious Life & Conversation, Prudent, of undoubted Loyalty to His Majesty, and competently skill’d in the Principles of Divinity, And in Popish Controversies.<sup>80</sup>

The committee was to cooperate with local presbyteries, who would be responsible for certifying and supervising the catechists, and with the committee of the SSPCK, many of whom, crucially, would be the most assiduous attenders of the meetings of the Royal Bounty Committee. In considering the administration, and indeed the records of the Royal Bounty, Wodrow’s words should be borne in mind: “I see all is managed by the Sub-committy, who are a feu in and about Edinburgh, and the Committy

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<sup>80</sup> NAS, CH1/1/29, 561; cf. CH1/5/51, 18-19.

only meets to approve of what they do, and read letters.” Matters tended to be decided by Nicol Spence, agent for the church, and the advocate John Dundas of Philipston, procurator for the church and the committee’s treasurer.<sup>81</sup>

Royal Bounty preachers’ duties would be as much political as religious:

And the said Preachers are also appointed to catechize, And both they and the Catechists to instruct the people from house to house, and visit the Sick, and in all their labours among the people to be careful to teach them the Principles and Duties of the true Christian Protestant Religion, And the Obligation they are under to Duty & Loyalty to Our Sovereign King George, and Obedience to the Laws.<sup>82</sup>

The allowances for the missionaries were remarkably generous by later standards: a preacher would earn up to £40 a year – an average salary for a minister – while a catechist could expect up to £25, although special circumstances could push his salary yet higher. The fund could also pay at the most £4 a month to ministers to go to areas where they would baptize and marry.<sup>83</sup> The subcommittee, which would convene every week, was appointed to prepare a relevant report. Like the Commission of the General Assembly, it would meet in the hall of the SSPCK.<sup>84</sup>

The subcommittee worked speedily, and three days later it presented its report, drawing upon the various presbyterial petitions and representations handed in to previous General Assemblies and Commissions, and also the recently printed 1716 Register of Royal Commission to enquire into establishing schools in the Highlands, a hugely ambitious report which contained a description of the region and its population, “Shewing where there are Papists and the greatest Ignorance.” The subcommittee listed the various Roman Catholic areas of the

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<sup>81</sup> Wodrow, *Analecta*, iii, 356, 357; cf. NAS, CH1/5/51, 4, 6, 14-20, 30, 32, 49-50, 87, 115, 121-4. Note the difficulty the committee had of getting a quorum during its first summer: *ibid.*, 30, 49.

<sup>82</sup> NAS, CH1/1/29, 562.

<sup>83</sup> NAS, CH1/1/29, 562.

<sup>84</sup> NAS, CH1/5/51, 6.

Gàidhealtachd, as well as stressing the importance of “Abertarff and the vast bounds of the Presbytery of Gairloch [which] have very few Ministers, and Ignorance and Barbarity abound therein”.<sup>85</sup> After the relevant areas had been enumerated, the subcommittee turned to nominating the missionaries themselves.

As well as the rather generous salaries it awarded, the first year of the Royal Bounty administration is striking for the haste in which its rather imaginative and overambitious schemes were drafted, and the sheer confusion of its organisation. Wodrow tells of a Mackenzie, a man “of excellent sense, but rigide Jacobit”, who when he heard of the Royal Bounty, exclaimed “Now they have fallen on the knack, and the most effectuell way of ruining our interests for ever.”<sup>86</sup> The actual working out of the scheme fell far short of the grandiose ambitions.

Hopelessly intricate plans were concocted by which ministers, supply ministers and catechists were peremptorily ordered to travel to the west for three months, with the onus placed upon the presbyteries to make good any resulting vacancies or supply replacement missionaries.<sup>87</sup> In addition, it was expected that all preachers and catechists were to be equipped with two testimonials for the presbyteries they were sent to: “a Certificate upon trial, from a Presbytery of this National Church, Of their Orthodoxy, Piety, Literature, Prudence and other necessary Qualifications for the Work they are respective called unto; As also An Authentick Certificate from a proper Judge of their Loyalty to His Majesty King George and good Affection to His Royal Family and Protestant Succession therein”.<sup>88</sup>

Of course, the system was totally unworkable. If even one man refused to take part, the scheme would fall. As soon as the news about the Royal Bounty spread, a flood of petitions came in from synods, presbyteries, and individual ministers, each claiming a share of the grant. However, the money was already divided up, and funds could bear no more. To make matters

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<sup>85</sup> NAS, CH1/5/51, 9-10.

<sup>86</sup> Wodrow, *Analecta*, iii, 289.

<sup>87</sup> Cf. the scheme for the Rough Bounds in NAS, CH1/5/51, 10-13; CH1/2/51, 136, /53, fos. 178, 194.

<sup>88</sup> NAS, CH1/5/51, 13.

worse, the notoriously rapacious Barons of the Exchequer who were responsible for granting the Royal Bounty decided to deduct a tax of 6d. in the pound. By August, barely three months into the scheme, the committee were already thinking about shortening the times allotted to their missionaries. Demand for their services was just too high.<sup>89</sup>

There was one major problem with the scheme: many of the missionaries nominated were either unwilling or unable to obey an apparently rather arbitrary order from afar to bid farewell to their homes and families and spend months travelling through rugged, unknown territory among disaffected, hostile and even dangerous inhabitants. It only took one missionary to refuse a call for an entire mission scheme to break down. For instance, the Rev. Walter Ross minister of Creich informed the committee that a local student Murdo MacDonald was “very averse from going in Mission to the Presbytery of Gairloch, for which he is appointed”. MacDonald asked to be excused, or else that a certain Andrew Robertson probationer in Caithness might be named in his place (for which Robertson must have been heartily grateful), or, alternatively, that he only preach in Coigeach and Assynt, immediately to the west of what must have been his native parish of Creich.<sup>90</sup>

The Presbytery of Lorn was even more unfortunate. In August, and once again in October, it enquired why not one of the missionaries appointed for the Rough Bounds had yet arrived. The Rev. John Skeldoch of Kilmonivaig replied that he could not leave his parish because those appointed to supply him had not arrived. Alexander Shaw, a probationer who had been appointed to preach in the Rough Bounds for a year, said that as neither the ministers nor the other probationer who had been ordered to go to the region had gone, “he did not think it safe for him alone to go there, And besides he Judged the Allowance granted him is not sufficient for his going to that Place”. Shaw was nevertheless ordered to repair forthwith to the bounds of the Presbytery of Lorn.<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> NAS, CH1/5/51, 20, 21, 23-59, 27; Wodrow, *Analecta*, iii, 289.

<sup>90</sup> NAS, CH1/5/51, 29-30; *cf.* 42.

<sup>91</sup> NAS, CH1/5/51, 42-3.



For those ministers and catechists who did go to preach, it was all too often a dispiriting experience. They found themselves in unknown and often hostile regions, far from ecclesiastical and civil support, and, in a mainly subsistence economy, having to pay exceptionally high prices for food and fuel. James Murray, writing from Kenmore in Lochaber on 22 July 1726, gives an excellent account of the difficulties the unfortunate missionaries, used to more comfortable lives in the low-lying Gàidhealtachd peripheries, or in the Lowland university towns, faced on their travels:

I must go with a hired Ser[va]nt to carry My Cloaths viz shirts and Blankets to lie in for here I must not expect to get bedcloaths, or bed in every house I come to (though I find the people abundantly kind, as yet, according to their ability) but they have for the most pt neither beds nor bed-cloaths to themselves, except one plaid and one pair of blanckets that the good-man & Good-wife have for their own bed wch is a Sorry hand-full of Straw; heather, or fearns, shaken on the floor, for none of the Common people have any bed-steeds of Timber or feather or Chaff beds served up in Eeking or Coars harn. I shall endeavour to stay here as a Catechist, for one quarter, if the Lords be pleased to spare me health and strength, though I should spend 6 lib. ster: but I assure I will not continue any longer unless my allowance be Augmented, for Mr Ballardine, who was an Appointed Catechist for the paroch of Kilmaly, only had 18 lib ster:

I cannot say that in weaty weather when I am treavling from town to town in Winter that my foot will be drie from time that I rise and go out in the morning, till I go to bed at night, for I have been so seall days already in this Countrie, besides the weading of waters daily if I treavel one mile of way, for there are no Bridges upon their Watters here, and how it will agree with me every Cold, frosty, Snowy & weaty night in the winter time ~~it will agree with me every day to be~~ changing my quarters, and every night my bed; and to lie in my own Cloaths, which sometimes will be Weat and Cold, on a Sorry pickle of neasty fearns &c – or handfull of Straw or heather time must determine. I find that that the Common people here have, or at least seem to have a great desire after, and a love to Spirituall things, and wish well to King

George and the Government for their bounty, and they say that yr was never a King on the Throne yt showed such favour to the Hillands.<sup>92</sup>

Aeneas Sage, recently arrived in Lochcarron, writes in September 1727 how:

I was like to be destroyed and all I had upon fryday night last when a Dreadful tempest beat Down a great Step in the miserable hut I live in some of my Books and cloaths have been Destroyed I tell you If I get a night or Day of the like tempest I must remove out of this Country and live else where would God you and oyr friends in your place knew the distress and the misery myself and oyr three of my brethren are for want of habitations in this Countrie and you wou'd certainly pitie and Sympathize wt us.<sup>93</sup>

Other missionaries were not only uncomfortable, but were in danger of their very lives. In a letter of February 1726, Murdo MacLeod minister of Glenelg recounts how "Fire was in the Night time set to the House where Mr Archibald McQueen & Mr Norman Mccleod Ministers sent in Mission were lodged, And that if by the Good Providence of God, it had not been timeously discovered, they might have perished in the Flames".<sup>94</sup> The Rev. John Skeldoch, recently arrived in Kilmonivaig, found himself the victim of a sustained campaign of intimidation:

he cannot obtain the posession of any house for the Accomodation of himself and family within the said parish as appears from some late extraordinary Events for no sooner being Necessary obliged to take a small portion of Lands for Yearlie Rents But That his Cattle were Killed in the Month of May 1726 his years peats burnt the September following And in the Month of October immediatly thereafter being Necessarly absent his house was in the Middle of the night sorrouned

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<sup>92</sup> NAS, CH1/2/53 fo. 173; also CH1/2/51, 300; EUL, Laing II 484(3)/187.

<sup>93</sup> NAS, CH1/2/70, fo. 293.

<sup>94</sup> NAS, CH1/5/51, 58; cf. CH2/567/1, 16.

by a party of Ruffians who shot in sharp shot thorow the doors and windows of the house Not only to the Great consternation of his wife and family But the danger of their lives.<sup>95</sup>

The unfortunate minister and his family had to seek refuge at the garrison of Inverlochy. Rather less lethal resistance appears in the case of the unfortunate James Johnston, a catechist in the bounds of the north-east Presbytery of Alford who in 1727 sent a letter to the committee "Shewing that he had got an house in that Country with great Difficulty, But that in his Absence Some People had taken off the Roof thereof, and he Craves advice What to do thereanent". The Committee kept their distance and "Left him to pursue these Who had done the Injury as Law directs."<sup>96</sup>

Meanwhile, no sooner had other young ministers begun to preach than they were immediately snapped up by the presbyteries to whose bounds they had been sent, a turn of events which had been foreseen by the Royal Bounty Committee from the beginning: "the Committee's Appointment shall be no impediment to their accepting thereof, And that thereupon they are free to leave the Places they are sent to".<sup>97</sup> The best-qualified and most able employees of the Royal Bounty scheme were thus increasingly replaced by inferior catechists. It is hardly surprising that by November the resourceful and conscientious Archibald Bannatyne, then serving as catechist in Lochaber, was pressing for a pet scheme of his, a two-tier scheme of catechists, "that some of smaller Abilities may serve in that place to go from house to house to learn the people the Ten Commands and first Principles of Religion, and the Catechism by heart, to prepare them for others of greater Abilities, And that such may be had for Fourty, Fifty or Sixty Pounds scots yearly, who may be maintain'd as to their diet in the families they come to".<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> NAS, CH1/2/55, fo. 259; cf. CH1/5/51, 185-6; CH2/7/1, 15, 18, 21, 22, 28, 29.

<sup>96</sup> NAS, CH1/5/51, 231.

<sup>97</sup> NAS, CH1/5/51, 14.

<sup>98</sup> NAS, CH1/5/51, 48; cf. 50, 51-2.

By November the Royal Bounty Committee, “finding that diverse of the Missioners have not as yet obey’d, that some of them are otherways disposed of, and cannot obey, And that others who have gone to the Places design’d have not stay’d out their full time”<sup>99</sup>, decided to grant no further allowances in advance.

The system was evidently in trouble, nowhere more so than in the Presbytery of Gairloch. Its territory took in the troubled districts of Wester Ross, Lochalsh and Kintail, a jacobite heartland many of whose inhabitants had taken part in the Risings of 1715 and 1719, and had still been in armed rebellion against crown representatives barely four years previously. Indeed, the only way the forfeited estates commissioners had been able to gather any rent at all was to compromise with Donald Murchison, factor for William Mackenzie, the exiled earl of Seaforth. The forfeited estates of Applecross and Torridon had been sold off to jacobite sympathisers, while Seaforth’s own estate remained unbought. During the jacobite scare of 1725, the government itself had no choice but to come to terms with the earl and allow him to return from the continent.<sup>100</sup>

If the establishing of the presbytery in 1724 was intended to boost the authority of the church on Wester Ross, it tended to exactly the opposite result. At the General Assembly of 1725, the Synod of Ross and Sutherland presented a petition in which they described how they “were inclined cheerfully to acquiesce in the Erection of the New Synod of Glenelg”, expecting “that in this Countrey we would be freed of the disturbing Opposition, Influence and Power of those in these Parts, who have signalized themselves by their Disaffection to Our happie Constitution in Church and State”. Instead, the weakness of and the hardships suffered by the two ministers who constituted the new presbytery to the west, “And the encouragement taken from the Impunity of those who do oppose them, does encrease Opposition and Disaffection within the bounds of this Synod, and Grievances insupportable are thrown upon such of our Members as are

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<sup>99</sup> NAS, CH1/5/51, 44.

<sup>100</sup> NAS, E609/20/2, especially fo. 2r.; /22/5-8, /10-11, /12-16, /21-3; Alexander Mackenzie, *History of the Clan Mackenzie* (Inverness, 1879), 230-40.



upon their Confines".<sup>101</sup> In other words, the Presbytery of Gairloch was quite inadequate, unable to exert its authority in the absence of official support. The resulting disturbances within its bounds were now spilling over into the parishes on its eastern border as well. In addition, given his mere 600 merks stipend, with neither manse, nor glebe, nor roofed kirk, the Rev. James Smith, minister of Gairloch, had been threatening for two years to leave his parish and thereby break the presbytery.<sup>102</sup>

Obviously something had to be done, but the preachers who were ordained as new ministers for the presbytery, Archibald Bannatyne in Lochbroom and Aeneas Sage in Lochcarron, were soon caught up in their long-standing struggles for stipends and other ministerial dues from the recalcitrant heritors. The previous generation of episcopal ministers in the region had been entirely dependent upon tacks from the local gentry for their maintenance. Given the hostility of the Mackenzie proprietors to their intrusion, and the continuing missionary efforts of their episcopalian and Catholic rivals, the presbytery had no alternative but to impose their authority, embarking on an ambitious and expensive scheme involving splitting parishes, repairing churches, building manses, setting aside glebes and grass and ensuring prompt payment of stipends. Both in political and financial terms, this represented an unacceptable challenge to local landlords.<sup>103</sup> Although the Presbytery of Gairloch, and indeed the Synod of Glenelg as a whole, had supposedly become the prime focus of the Royal Bounty Committee's efforts from 1726 onwards<sup>104</sup>, the understandable

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<sup>101</sup> NAS, CH1/3/17, 482; cf. CH1/1/31, 29-30; CH2/312/2, 316-17, 329-30.

<sup>102</sup> NAS, CH1/3/17, 487-9, 502-3, 540; CH1/5/51, 47, 57; CH1/2/66, fo. 99v; Wodrow, *Analecta*, iii, 139-40; also CH2/92/4, 189, 193, 220-1; /5, 4-5, 6-8, 10-12, 17, 20; CH2/312/2, 175, 197, 225-6, 238-9, 244, 250-1, 266. For similar problems with the suppressed Presbytery of Aberlour, see CH1/1/27, 363-6, 438; /29, 155-7; CH1/2/53, fos. 175-6, 222; CH1/3/19, 101-2.

<sup>103</sup> NAS, CH1/1/31, 416; CH1/5/51, 279; CH2/7/1, 28, 31; CH2/567/1, 10, 11, 12-13, 14, 16, 17, 18-23, 24-48; also CH2/92/4, 163, 165, 207, 225-7, 228, 234, 243, 244, 245, 249, 251-2, 256; /5, 5, 15, 18, 24, 26, 31, 45; CH2/312/2, 134, 152, 174, 192-3, 196-7, 219-20, 241, 262; McHugh, "Kirk, state and the Catholic problem", 95-8, 120-3.

<sup>104</sup> NAS, CH1/3/17, 537-40.

reluctance of preachers to travel there, and the slow and tedious legal processes the church was forced to go through in order to obtain the Gairloch clergy's stipends, led to increasing tensions with Edinburgh, tensions which would eventually flare up into open disagreement.

If some preachers were rather disinclined to undertake their mission, others were much more aggressive. The most pugnacious of all was the Presbytery of Strathbogie in the north-east, in their own words "the Sink and Centure of Popery and Superstition in Scotland", whose ministers had been prosecuting a long and bitter feud with Alexander, second duke of Gordon, the most influential Scots Catholic of the day.<sup>105</sup> Because of the vast and scattered estates of which he was either owner or superior, the duke of Gordon was able to promote Catholicism across great swathes of the country, from the Spey right through Badenoch to Lochaber. The duke protected the priests who worked on his estates, and was patron of the Catholic seminary at the Scalan in Glenlivet. The Royal Bounty scheme gave local ministers, long chafing at his open support for Roman Catholicism, the opportunity and the excuse to take their struggle almost right into the duke's own household.

At the beginning of September 1725 two men employed by the Royal Bounty Committee, the Rev. Walter Morison, himself a convert from Catholicism, and the catechist Patrick Duncan, began to preach in St Ninian's, the duke of Gordon's private chapel, near Fochabers. Not only was the chapel the burial-ground of the duke's family, it was also the final resting-place of Bishop Thomas Nicolson himself.<sup>106</sup> The service evidently created a great stir in the neighbourhood, for a couple of days later the earl of Findlater sent a letter post-haste to the duke, sympathising with him and pledging his support in trying to prevent a similar occurrence the following Sunday. Findlater had been the King's Commissioner to the General Assembly the previous year, where he had been urged to take action against popery; however, he was also sheriff of Banffshire, and public order was evidently uppermost in his mind. Although the draft of duke's reply is

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<sup>105</sup> NAS, CH1/5/51, 342; cf. CH2/342/4, 313, 318, 331, 335, 350, 352, 469, 481, 484, 491, 508.

<sup>106</sup> Doran, "Bishop Thomas Nicolson", 144.

somewhat ominous, it is unlikely that he approved of the full-scale riot which took place the following Sunday.<sup>107</sup> Morison, Duncan and the local SSPCK schoolmaster William Scobie were ambushed at the chapel by a sizeable mob. According to the Committee's report, they badly beat the preachers and those in the congregation:

with great clamour, rage, and fury to the Effusion of the Blood, and Danger of the Lives of many of them, Uttering many execrable Oaths, and cursing the foresaid Preacher and his Congregation, and reproaching Our Holy Religion, and swearing it shall never get footing there, And after they had violently dispersed the people who came to hear the Word, they did pursue the Preacher and them with the foresaid Weapons for near a mile of Way, through the several roads by which they were oblig'd to flee to save their Lives, And while the said Mr Archibald Anderson and others of the persons abovenamed and complained upon, were in pursute of the said Mr Walter and the other persons who came to the foresaid place for Worship, they cry'd after them, Saying Dogs, Dogs you shall dy this minute<sup>108</sup>

The "rabbling" at St Ninian's became something of a cause célèbre among church circles, and certainly shocked the authorities. Representations concerning the riot were presented by the Presbytery of Strathbogie and the Commission of the General Assembly to the very highest level of government in London, indeed reaching the ears of the king himself.<sup>109</sup> Although five of the rioters were eventually charged in Edinburgh, only one of them, Thomas Pyrie, was actually convicted, and that probably more for his position as the duke's ground officer rather than for any involvement in the affray. The law lords were prepared to make an example of one man as a warning, but it is clear that they were not prepared to encourage the local church authorities to take part in further provocations. By spring 1727, the other rioters, after lying low for a while, "do notwithstanding

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<sup>107</sup> NAS, GD44/43/11/112/1-2.

<sup>108</sup> NAS, CH1/5/51, 39; cf. 33, 34.

<sup>109</sup> PRO, SP54/16/23, /26, /29, /36C, /40.

live and reside in Safety in the forsaid Country, going to Mercats, and other publick places avowedly".<sup>110</sup>

The St Ninian's riot is the most notable and spectacular of a number of actions taken by Catholics in response to what might be described as the more proactive policy taken by the missionaries of the Royal Bounty, attested in the records by allusions to growing "popish insolence" from the papists they were trying to convert. The Catholic population may have had a somewhat different perspective. What is clear is that during these years both presbyterians and Catholics, not to mention the remnant episcopalian church, were intensifying their missionary efforts. Because of the effect of the Royal Bounty scheme, the process of confessionalisation was diffusing to all parts of the Gàidhealtachd. Like it or not, everyone was being forced to take sides.<sup>111</sup>

The most spectacular protestant coup of this time was the forced conversion of what appears to have been a sizeable and growing Catholic minority in the Island of Rum by the then landlord Hector MacLean younger of Coll. The Rev. Daniel MacAulay, the very capable minister of Bracadale in Skye, had been sent as a missionary to the Small Isles by the Royal Bounty Committee. He reported as follows:

as to the Isles of Cana and Rour to which he was sent, He represented that he had no Access in Cana to deal with the people, Because they would not hear him, being under the Influence of Priests and Popish Managers and dare not hear a Protestant Minister preach or pray; But

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<sup>110</sup> NAS, CH1/5/51, 185, 283; cf. CH1/2/53, fo. 185-6; CH1/3/17, 508-9; CH1/5/51, 61-4; CH2/342/4, 539; /5, 1, 3, 5-6, 8, 10, 21, 25, 31, 39, 54, 71, 76, 91, 93, 95, 100, 105; CH2/271/5, 234-5, 242, 251, 262, 278, 283; GD44/40/8/23-4, /28; /43/14/2, /11, /18-19, /22, /27-8; NAS, (West Register House), JC3/13, 331-9, 369-96, 403-4; JC7/13 sub 10-14, 16 March 1726; JC26/111/D1349 (my thanks to Malcolm Bangor-Jones for this last reference); PRO, SP54/16/57, /71-2, /76, /109; SCA, BL2/272/12-15, /286/20; CC1/10, 825-7; /11, 1254-5; NLS, MS 5073 fos. 19-20; EUL, Laing II 484(3)/193, /199, /213, /219, /221, /224-6; Anson, *Underground Catholicism*, 119-22; Forbes Leith, *Memoirs*, ii, 305-6; Maclean, *Counter-Reformation*, 209-12; Watts, *Hugh MacDonald*, 46-7.

<sup>111</sup> NAS, CH1/5/51, 160, 182-3; SCA, IM6/2, 7.



in the Isle of Rùm, the Reformation goes on successfully by the Zeal of their Worthy Superior Hector McLean of Coll, which should be duly noticed by the Church and other good friends of the Government to encourage others to follow his laudable Example; For about three years ago there were few Protestants in the Isle of Rùm And now there is only One little Family and some silly Women there continuing under Antichristian Delusion.<sup>112</sup>

This was what was later described to Dr. Samuel Johnson as *creideamh a' bhata bhuidhe*, the religion of the yellow cane. Whether Hector MacLean did indeed drive the entire population with a gold-topped cane to listen to the minister, or whether he in fact just used his stick to beat a single zealous Catholic, the laird of Coll nevertheless became something of a hero to the church authorities.<sup>113</sup> In the absence of support from distant local magistrates, Hector MacLean was a beacon of support. He had shown what could be achieved by a well-affected and none too scrupulous landowner, indeed – perhaps – how easy it would be to convert erstwhile Catholic Gaels as long as their papist superiors could be disposed of. MacAulay and other ministers encouraged the committee in the delusion that they might, with suitable legal support, be rid of Catholic heritors and thus spread the Reformation in earnest. There was, however, no small difference between the relatively small, isolated island of Rùm, and, for instance, the sprawling estates of Clan Ranald, for instance. Despite official support from the earl

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<sup>112</sup> NAS, CH1/3/17, 508-9; CH1/2/53, fo. 185-6; CH1/5/51, 54, 55-6, 61-4; CH2/271/5, 234-5, 242, 251, 262, 278, 283; GD44/40/8/23-4, /28; /43/14/2, /11, /18-19, /22, /27-8.

<sup>113</sup> John A. Love, *Rùm: a landscape without figures* (Edinburgh, 2001), 54-6; also NLS, MS 3430, fo. 228; NAS, CH1/3/17, 508-9; CH1/2/53, fo. 185-6; CH1/5/51, 61-4; CH1/5/119, 8; CH2/557/5, 278; CH2/271/5, 234-5, 242, 251, 262, 278, 283; GD44/40/8/23-4, /28; /43/14/2, /11, /18-19, /22, /27-8; SCA, CC1/10, 813; EUL, Laing II 484(1)/285-6; Wodrow, *Analecta*, iii, 288-9; idem, *Correspondence* ii, 244-5; Forbes Leith, *Memoirs*, ii, 296; Bellesheim, *History*, iv, 188n.4; McHugh, "Religious condition", 15, 20; Prunier, "Catholiques, presbytériens", 223. For Hector MacLean of Coll, see Colm Ó Baoill (ed.), *Duanaire Colach 1537-1757* (Aberdeen, 1997), xxxvi-xxxix; 86.

of Ilay himself, early eighteenth-century realpolitik meant that such a project was bound to come to nothing. Hector MacLean, however, was invited to the General Assembly to tell his story, and thence sent as a ruling elder to the Synod of Glenelg to encourage them in their labours. The church was thus all the more encouraged in the belief that hardline measures would succeed.<sup>114</sup>

### The Royal Bounty Committee and the SSPCK

It has been noted how SSPCK schoolteacher William Scobie was present at the St Ninian's rabbling, and indeed how the Royal Bounty Committee shared many, perhaps a majority, of its members with the organization. The Society in Scotland for the Propagating of Christian Knowledge, a joint-stock charity with the aim of erecting schools in the Highlands, had been founded in 1709 following the jacobite invasion scare of the previous year. Dependent upon investments and donations for its income, this zealous and extremely well-motivated organization developed remarkably sophisticated techniques for raising funds. The 1714 *Account of the rise, constitution and management, of the Society in Scotland, for Propagating Christian Knowledge* is a good case in point. Not only does the little booklet give potential donors an instant guide to the constitution, aims and successes of the organization, it also by way of thanks and encouragement lists those who have already contributed.<sup>115</sup>

Just as the Church of Scotland had passed a whole raft of anti-Catholic measures in the aftermath of the Atterbury Plot, the SSPCK used it as an opportunity to try to attract more money, lobbying the government in an

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<sup>114</sup> NAS, CH1/5/51, 97, 119, 186, 455.

<sup>115</sup> McHugh, "Kirk, state and the Catholic problem", 85-7; also M.G. Jones, *The charity school movement: a study of eighteenth century puritanism in action* (Cambridge, 1938), especially 3-14, 176-8; also Craig Rose, "Evangelical philanthropy and Anglican revival: The charity schools of Augustan London, 1698-1740", *London Journal*, 16 (1991), 35-65; Eamon Duffy, "The Long Reformation: Catholicism, Protestantism and the multitude" in Nicholas Tyacke (ed.), *England's Long Reformation 1500-1800* (London, 1998), 56-65. For aggressive lobbying in the church by the SSPCK during the later 1720s, see also NAS, CH1/1/31, 235-9, 327-9; CH1/2/55, fos. 263, 301-2; /59, fos. 92-3; GD95/1/3, 2-5.

attempt – unsuccessfully as it turns out – to secure the grant of the up to £20,000 it felt it was due from income from the Forfeited Estates. A memorial concerning the state of the Highlands was composed and printed in 1723, luridly warning that:

untill methods be fallen upon to Civilize and Instruct them, and extirpate the Irish Language from amongst them that Great Britain will alwayes be in most evident danger, ffor as these people will never fail to Join with fforreign popish powers, to advance the Interests they have espoused, So they alwayes have been, and infallible will be Instruments and Tools in the hands of those who have a design to enslave or embroil the British nation.

A policy of outright repression would be no use; rather the government should persist in:

the instructing and training up of that poor, Ignorant and deluded people in the knowledge of the Principles of the Reformed Protestant Religion and of vertue ffor were their Judgement and Consciences rightly informed, those people would soon throw off the yokes which those who now usurp unlimited authoritie over them, have Laid upon them, especially when they shall come to deserve and feel the benefite of Protection from the Government.<sup>116</sup>

At the same time, the society was refining its management methods: its meetings were streamlined, inspection and surveillance of its schools were stepped up, and the use of English therein was further encouraged. Lobby operations were begun to identify potential donors in London, and it was suggested that well-wishers might donate shares in the projected new fishery company; indeed, an abortive attempt was made to secure a yearly fund out of the Royal Bounty itself.<sup>117</sup>

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<sup>116</sup> NAS, GD95/1/2, 236, 237; cf. PRO, SP54/14/26, /34, /38.

<sup>117</sup> NAS, GD95/1/2, 230-3, 243-4, 250-1, 296-301; /2/3, 159-65, 185-8, 188-90, 199-200, 213, 243, 307; cf. GD95/10/73, /75-6; PRO, SP54/14/26, /34.

The committee of the SSPCK moved swiftly to establish relations with that of the Royal Bounty. Three weeks after the establishment of the latter, the society nominated four of their members who also sat on the church committee to act as intermediaries. As a demonstration of their commitment to reforming the Highlands, the committee decided to commission on the very same day the already mooted Gaelic “vocables”, a project which culminated in the publication in 1741 of the first printed Gaelic dictionary.<sup>118</sup> Two months later, the intermediaries presented a memorial to their colleagues.<sup>119</sup> The SSPCK committee were already considering redistributing its schools in order better to correspond with the needs of the Royal Bounty. On 13 August 1725 it informed the church committee that:

Bearing that there are many more Places needing and craving Schools, And that the Society being desirous to make the benefite of their Funds as extensive as they could, had been obliged upon the Death or Removal of Schoolmasters to diminish the Salaries formerly in use to be paid, in order to have the more Schools, And also to remove the Masters from place to place, after they have been three or more years therein, And yet they are not in case to answer all the Demands that are made; But having had Information concerning the State of the Parishes of Kilmanivaig, Gairloch and South Uist, With the Isles of Coll, Tirree, Egg, Roun, Muck and Canan and Country of Glenstrafarer, And being informed That there is a mixture of Protestants in South Uist, Kilmanivaig, Glenstrafarer, and in the Isles of Muck, Roun, Egg and Cana, And that now Southuist has given a Call to One to be their Minister, That one is lately settled in Kilmanivaig, And that these of the foresaid four Isles are about calling One, As likewise that Preachers and Catechists are sent to these Places, The Committee of the said Society Judged this a proper Season of sending Schoolmasters thither, Seeing Ministers, Preachers & Catechists may very much encourage the Schools, And have therefore under consideration the providing of

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<sup>118</sup> NAS, CH1/5/51, 26-7, 32; GD95/2/3, 310, 334.

<sup>119</sup> NAS, GD95/2/3, 335.



these Places with Schoolmasters and Books, tho' they should sink their Schools in other places where they are not so needful<sup>120</sup>

In other words, the SSPCK was prepared to alter its entire scheme of schools in order to cooperate more effectively with the Royal Bounty Committee. Perhaps an idea of the society's eventual aim is hinted at in the request immediately following, concerning a John Ewing who had lately been settled by the society in Rannoch at a salary of 100 merks, supplemented with 50 merks by Lady Weem "out of her Concern for the Good of that Country". This sum was too small for Ewing and his "numerous family", and the SSPCK thereupon petitioned the Royal Bounty Committee for help:

seeing the said Mr John Ewing is willing upon the Saturdays afternoon, And upon the Lord's Days to travel from house to house as a Catechist in that Country, And in Summer to go the Shields, And may be very useful therein, the parish being very wide, It is craved He may on that Account have Ten Pounds Sterling more allow'd him for his further encouragment, And there was produced a Letter from Doctor Dundas Præses of the said Committee, Also A Memorial from Sir Robert Menzies of Weem to the same purpose, And a Representation from the Presbytery of Dunkeld, Giving an Account of the State of Ranoch and other Places in their bounds<sup>121</sup>

Given the stress they put on the fact that they already had financial backing from both local church and local landowner, the society appear to have been rather nervous about making their proposal. Nevertheless, it was accepted by the Royal Bounty Committee, and so John Ewing became the first, but by no means the last, catechist-schoolmaster jointly employed by both organizations. Although the Royal Bounty Committee were certainly ready to try to use its money to fund teachers as well as catechists,

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<sup>120</sup> NAS, CH1/5/51, 26-7; cf. GD95/1/2, 341-3, 349-50, 353-5, 357-8, 371; /2/3, 331-2.

<sup>121</sup> NAS, CH1/5/51, 27; also CH1/2/51, 305, 308, 310-11.

it appears that the disputatious 1726 General Assembly was either unable or unwilling to alter the rigid terms of the original grant.<sup>122</sup> During the first few years of its operation, then, the Royal Bounty Committee viewed the SSPCK schoolmasters as being complementary to the catechists rather than possibly one and the same, though there are hints that “a smal gratification” was given to schoolteachers to catechise in the “front line” parishes of Lochcarron and Kilmonivaig, as well as the recently converted island of Rum.<sup>123</sup> No general principle was asserted, however, and it is noteworthy that on the very same day as the SSPCK memorial for Rannoch was read, the Presbytery of Kincardine O’Neil’s application for additional missionaries was turned down because “the Society for Christian knowledge have three Charity Schools therein.”<sup>124</sup> As for the wild district of Rannoch, John Ewing did not even last a year there, demitting his post in the autumn of 1726.<sup>125</sup>

### **Hardline policies: The Royal Bounty 1726-1728**

The rabbling at St Ninian’s and the resistance, violent or otherwise, shown by Catholics to presbyterian missionaries provided a convenient pretext for the Commission of the General Assembly to request, in March 1726, that the Royal Bounty be continued. The government, genuinely concerned about continuing Catholic resistance, not to mention obsessed with the largely illusory danger of jacobite intrigue in the north, gave its assent: the thousand pounds demonstrated to a church somewhat nervous about the apparently relentless progress of popery in the north that the authorities continued to

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<sup>122</sup> Wodrow, *Analecta*, iii, 300-1; cf. NAS, CH1/5/51, 51-2, 53-4, 64-5, 68-9; NLS, MS 1008, fo. 19v.

<sup>123</sup> NAS, GD95/1/2, 371-2; /2/3, 377, 392-3.

<sup>124</sup> NAS, CH1/5/51, 27; cf. 27-9.

<sup>125</sup> NAS, CH1/5/51, 30-1, 109, 120, 144, ; GD95/1/2, 318, 362, 379, 386, 394, 410; /2/3, 247, 277, 294, 330, 344-5, 355-6, 399, 411, 416; /2/4, 200-1, 242-3.

take the matter in hand.<sup>126</sup> In addition, the grant, as well as the strong measures promised to be employed against Catholicism, was a useful way of boosting the standing of the King's Commissioner in his efforts to dampen down increasingly passionate disputes within the church itself. The earl of Loudon, who held the position in the 1726 General Assembly, writes of the members' "great gratitude for [the] Royal Bounty, in which, whatever other differences they have amongst themselves, they are very sincere."<sup>127</sup>

The second year of the Royal Bounty grant, then, saw a general hardening of attitudes among committee members, clergy, and indeed the authorities themselves. The conversion of Catholics and indeed episcopalians to presbyterianism was by no means as effortless an affair as had been imagined. Further government support was sought and secured. The legal framework in the Highlands might still be found wanting, but there was now a new state authority in the region to be won over, an authority who might possibly allow the church to "short-circuit" reluctant heritors and civil magistrates: namely, General Wade, and the Independent Companies under his command.<sup>128</sup> The church began to look for ways of employing this force to bolster the Royal Bounty scheme: continuing "insolence" from papists in the Rough Bounds, for instance, led the Presbytery of Lorn to request official support to settle entire military garrisons in their territory, in order to protect projected plantations of Protestants.<sup>129</sup> Apprehension of Catholic priests, although a part of the official instructions given to Wade, had hitherto not been a priority.<sup>130</sup> This was about to change.

<sup>126</sup> NAS, CH1/5/51, 68; cf. CH1/1/31, 37-46; for the contemporary situation and Jacobite scares in the Gàidhealtachd, see NLS, MS 7187 fos. 82, 95, 98v.; MS 12157; PRO, SP54/16/1, /74, /93A; /17/7, /47, /51, /55, /59, /63, /71; /18/38, /41, /54; /19/34, /41, /83, /85-6, /91, /94, /97, /100-1; NAS, CH2/568/1, fos. 11-12; *Culloden papers*, 97-8, 102, 106-11; Wodrow, *Analecta*, iii, 361-2, 372-5; Mitchison, "The government and the Highlands", 34-5.

<sup>127</sup> PRO, SP54/17/16, /26A, /26C, /26F; NLS, MS 5073 fos. 23, 27; MS Adv.81.9.11 fo. 85; ; Wodrow, *Analecta*, iii, 288-9.

<sup>128</sup> NAS, CH1/3/17, 506, 511; CH1/5/51, 9, 29; CH2/568/1, 6-7; CH2/312/2, 328-9, 352-3; GD95/1/2, 340; /2/3, 318, 333.

<sup>129</sup> NAS, CH1/5/51, 94.

<sup>130</sup> NLS, MS 7187, fo. 33.

General Wade's military mission, and the institution of the Royal Bounty fund, threatening to swamp the Gàidhealtachd with ministers and catechists, certainly alarmed the Scottish Catholic mission.<sup>131</sup> As long as they were only faced with a few protestant clergy, it was possible, at least in the islands and the remoter areas of the mainland, to resist their incursions. George Douglas, priest in Arisaig, wrote on 11 February 1726 "that the Ministers have come to these countreys: listing all the people in a scroll, as they were to recruit shouldiers, the people here undervalues them, tho they threaten violence, Punishment, and loss of means."<sup>132</sup> A letter of 31 January 1726 by priest Alexander Paterson, describes the situation in South Uist where, given the lack of government support, protestant preachers had to submit to an uneasy peace with their Catholic neighbours:

When I was in the mainland with my Lady, ther came here from Sky, a Parish Minister, a Divine of the kirk, and a School Master. The Minster was for preaching, and the Divine for praying, and in my absence they fell on with such zeal, that they thought to cary all befor them. I hearing of their proceedings hasted in to my people, and thought a better policy to come up to them by friendship and civility, than to stand at a punctelious distance. But indeed I found them more desirous of my friendship, than I was of theirs, only they told me, that they design'd no harm to the country, but to do their endeavour in discharging their duty; Upon this finding the people fix'd in their principles, they begin to take a more dangerous way, which is of bribing the poorer Sort into their Sermons: You know very well how far the poor are influenc'd by Interest, and what our Lowland Missionerss Supplys by the publick Box, a Churchman here has no means, but to Supply out of his own poor quota. But notwithstanding of all their endeavours, I've gain'd three from them Since they came here, which makes them begin to

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<sup>131</sup> SCA, BL2/272/13; /275/16; /276/4, /7; /278/9, /11.

<sup>132</sup> SCA, BL2/283/2.



look something more grimm upon me, yet allwayes outwardly good friends.<sup>133</sup>

This was certainly not the case with Catholic mission stations in the eastern Highlands, where the government reaction to the rabbling at St Ninian's changed everything. Lord Grange, who had recently acquired the forfeited estate of his brother, the exiled earl of Mar, prepared another memorial for the government, this time based upon his personal observations on the growth of Catholicism. In it, he listed the priests in the eastern Highlands and recommended that they be apprehended by a party of the Independent Companies. The swiftness of its preparation and the rigour of its recommendations may have something to do with the fact that Grange had to demonstrate his loyalty to the authorities in London, having been accused of covert jacobitism in anonymous letters sent to the government earlier in the year. Grange did not advocate, however, that captured priests be executed, for fear of exciting sympathy; rather, they should be banished by law.<sup>134</sup>

The ferocity of the ensuing persecution in the eastern Highlands was unprecedented for at least a generation. Writing at the end of 1726, Bishop James Gordon sums up what had happened:

a good number of the Indepdt compys were sent up & down in several countrys, & wanderd through them for about a fortnight together, a party went by orders to S[cala]n, & threatn'd to lodge thereabout all winter, & to send some of their number every other day; & as the storm had been foreseen all who used to stay there had scatter'd; after

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<sup>133</sup> SCA, BL2/290/1; cf. CC1/12, 1791-3; NAS, CH1/2/59, fo. 16. For a setpiece debate between opposing clergy, see SCA, CC1/10, 820-1; TM/2, 105-6; NAS, CH1/5/51, 13; Colm Ó Baoill and Donald MacAulay, *Scottish Gaelic vernacular verse: a checklist* (Aberdeen, 2001), no.250; also Norman H. MacDonald, *The Morrison Manuscript* (Stornoway, 1975), 257. For ministers using money to help to gain converts, see CH1/5/51, 99, 245.

<sup>134</sup> PRO, SP54/16/29A, /36C, /40; cf. SCA, BL2/283/2; /287/1; /294/3; NAS, CH1/1/31, 39; CH1/3/17, 524-30; GD95/2/3, 416; NLS, MS 1008, fos. 17r.-v.; Wodrow, *Analecta*, iii, 306, 506, 510.

some weeks M. Fife [i.e. Gordon himself] made the prentcs [pupils] return, & sometimes the shop-keeper [schoolmaster] was with them; they are still threatn'd but especially he; & there is never quiet because of the restless & unrelenting malice of the P[resbyt]ers, who clamour without end; & make the Capts in spite of them in a manner strive to do mischief.<sup>135</sup>

Fervent harassment of priests culminated in the arrest and imprisonment in Inverness of Father William Shand on 29 May.<sup>136</sup> On the continent, the managers of the Scottish mission took action on two fronts. In April 1726, Abbé Stuart, the agent of the Scottish clergy in Rome, was able to secure from the Vatican an emergency grant of 500 ducats for the perpetually impoverished Scottish mission.<sup>137</sup> In the autumn James Carnegie, agent in Paris and effectively director of the Scottish Catholic church abroad, lobbied Cardinal Fleury, who had recently acquired absolute power in France, and the French ambassador in London to intercede on behalf of the oppressed Scottish Catholics. Although similar appeals Carnegie made to court in 1710 and 1723 had proved efficacious, his later mission appears to have met with only limited success, given the king's sympathy with the presbyterian cause.<sup>138</sup> It was thanks to the intercession of the duke of Gordon, spurred on by a letter from the pope himself, that the persecution was eventually lifted towards the end of the year.<sup>139</sup> Shand was released and

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<sup>135</sup> SCA, BL2/284/9; cf. /260/5; /284/13; /287/3, /17; /292/2; /295/15, /17; CC1/14, 1929; Forbes Leith, *Memoirs*, ii, 299, 301, 304-5, 306, 307-8; Bellesheim, *History*, iv, 381-3; cf. NAS, CH2/271/5, 245-6, 251; CH2/437/1, 131-2, 134, 136, 138, 145.

<sup>136</sup> SCA, BL2/287/2; CC1/10, 830, 833-4; PRO, SP54/17/32, /59; NAS, CH2/437/1, 132, 134, 136; GD44/43/14/11; Duncan Warrand (ed.), *More Culloden papers* (Inverness, 1925), iii, 3.

<sup>137</sup> SCA, BL2/286/14-17; /293/7-9; Forbes Leith, *Memoirs*, ii, 303, 305.

<sup>138</sup> SCA, BL2/282/14; /287/10, /14, /15-16; /288/8; /295/23; /297/8, /14; /298/1-3; CC1/11, 1255-62, 1264-6; TM/2, 101-3; cf. Wodrow, *Analecta*, iii, 458-9; idem, *Correspondence* iii, 259; Anson, *Catholic church*, 87; Forbes Leith, *Memoirs*, ii, 306-7; Doran, "Bishop Thomas Nicolson", 82.

<sup>139</sup> SCA, BL2/284/9; /287/20; cf. Timothy J. McCann (ed.), *The Goodwood Estate archives*, iii (Chichester, 1984), 15.

banished from Scotland north of the Tay. Scarcely a year later, he surfaces in Aberdeen.<sup>140</sup>

The most lasting effect of the persecution was as a further incentive for the institution of a bishop for the Highlands. The possibility of a coadjutor with responsibility for the Gàidhealtachd had first been mooted by Scottish priests some three years previously. Bishop Gordon was getting no help whatsoever from Bishop John Wallace, who, incapacitated after a spell in prison after the Fifteen, “keeps himself from wind & weather and studies nothing but to take care of his health”. Gordon therefore had to undertake the annual Highland visitations himself, and the excessive fatigue he suffered during these arduous visits proved not only a threat to his health but to his life itself. James Carnegie, hearing of the proposal, “beged they would choose him a young strong one who could run about go thro’ the West and take all that is fatigueing upon him so that Mr Fife may afterwards live at his ease and take care of a life so precious to many.”<sup>141</sup> Given the vehemence of the persecution, Gordon not only felt bound to visit the Highlands and encourage priests and congregations, further impairing his health, but, in a new and alarming development, as Thomas Innes writes:

there’s such an extram want of a head to direct uniformly the Laborers in West that if no helper can be gott, I find M. Fife is resolvd to go up himself & live among them in some creek or corner where they can have access to consult him, but then what will come of trade, a few moneths these will end him.<sup>142</sup>

Faced not only with renewed persecution in the Gàidhealtachd by an “Apish Presbyterian Prop[agan]da Fide”, but the possibility of the arrest or even death of the most important figure in Catholic Scotland, Scottish Catholics on the continent were forced to take steps towards the consecration

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<sup>140</sup> SCA, BL2/299/7; /303/17; /314/3; CC1/13, 1894-6; TM/2, 141.

<sup>141</sup> SCA, BL2/249/9; cf. /260/2, /4-5, /8-9, /17; CC1/10, 814, 818, 819, 822-4; /14, 1967.

<sup>142</sup> SCA, BL2/287/6; cf. /2; /291/7; SM3/13/7; Forbes Leith, *Memoirs*, ii, 302-3; cf. SCA, TM/2, 132-3; NAS, CH1/5/51, 60.

of a bishop for the Highlands. Unfortunately, Bishop Gordon's chosen candidate, Alexander John Grant, was far from ideal. Sickly, lacking in confidence, and cruelly conscious of his failings, Grant lingered in Genoa on his way back from Rome, then disappeared from record, either into trappist obscurity or an early grave.<sup>143</sup>

As well as the problem of combatting Catholicism, the question of stipends – ministerial salaries – was growing ever more acute, above all in the Presbytery of Gairloch. Several of the newly-planted ministers in the western Gàidhealtachd owed their position to their original commissions as Royal Bounty missionaries. Finding themselves serving in parishes quite devoid of any financial support, they naturally turned to their erstwhile sponsors, the Royal Bounty Committee, for assistance. Ironically enough, they had been better off previously as mere salaried preachers. It should be remembered that one of the reasons the bounty was requested in the first place was as a subvention for ministers' stipends and for the creation of new parishes. To be fair, the Royal Bounty Committee sympathised and gave what assistance it could, but it was in no position to speed up the painfully slow legal processes, especially given that the unsold forfeited estate of Seaforth was for the time being administered by the Barons of the Exchequer. The committee's refusal or inability to bend the terms of the original grant meant that it had constantly to turn down requests for money. At the same time, the exasperated ministers saw that those missionaries who had been despatched as auxiliaries simply did not turn up.<sup>144</sup>

The Royal Bounty Committee was at last receiving reports about how their missionaries had been performing, and was readjusting its rules accordingly. For example, Alexander Leask had served as a missionary in the Presbytery of Turriff from June to October 1726. However, having received a letter and a certificate from him, the committee:

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<sup>143</sup> SCA, BL2/286/14; also /284/13, /16; /286/8-9, /13, /19; /287/8, /11; /288/1, /3; /294/9; CC1/10, 828-9, 835-7, 839-40; /14, 1936-63; SM12/3/1-2; TM/2, 115, 133-9, 143-9, 153-6; Anson, *Underground Catholicism*, 123-4; Dorrian, "Hugh MacDonald", 37-9; Watts, *Hugh MacDonald*, 53, 58-9.

<sup>144</sup> PRO, SP54/17/18; NAS, CH1/3/19, 95, 104; CH1/5/51, 57-8, 81, 101-2, 131, 132-3, 140, 147.



did take Notice that there was nothing in the forsaid Letter or Certificate of Mr Leask's Visiting families or Catechising, Nor Dealling with Papists for their Conversion, But only of his Preaching, which Seems not fully to Answer the Design of His Majestie's Grant, Nor Acts of the General Assembly made thereanent; And Finding that other Certificates Bear nothing of Visiting Families and Catechising. The Committee Appointed that Letters be wrote to the Presbyteries Concern'd, To which Missionaries are Sent, Acquainting them of this, And that it is not the Design of His Majestie's Gift to Ease Ministers of their work, But that all Missionaries, Ministers and Probationers should travel from House to House, visiting and Catechising; And Presbyteries are to Enquire if they do so, And Certifie them as it shall be found they Deserve.<sup>145</sup>

At the next meeting Aeneas Sage complained on behalf of the Presbytery of Gairloch "that the Probationers formerly there, were very Slight in their work, never having Catechised among the People, which should have been a great part of their Work". It was proposed "that no Money be given to Probationers, But such as are attested to be Qualified According to Law".<sup>146</sup>

The committee was not only clamping down on catechists, but also on any presbyteries who certified catechists without its permission in the first place. Immediately after reading Leask's letter, the members:

Finding that Diverse Presbyterys having Employed Catechists without any Warrant from this Committee, And then Demanding Allowance from the time of their Entry, when the Committee have already Exhausted the Grant by their own Appointments, Do Therefore order that Letters be wrote to the Presbyterys Concern'd, Acquainting them, That the Committee will grant no Salaries Nor Allowances to any, But

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<sup>145</sup> NAS, CH1/5/51, 149; cf. 155; Wodrow, *Analecta*, iii, 356-7.

<sup>146</sup> NAS, CH1/5/51, 151.

such as Serve upon the Committee's orders, and only for that time, According to their own Regulations.<sup>147</sup>

The rules were to be tightened up: presbytery certificates, it was decided, were now to "Bear a Clause that the Missionaries Do Catechise the People, going from House to House for that end, And that they are Qualified to the Government."<sup>148</sup> The committee itself was trying to set its own house in order, especially through attempting to regulate its chaotic accounts with a new rule that all missionaries' salaries should now commence on the 1 November.

Presbyteries and missionaries alike were now having to justify their conduct to the committee in Edinburgh. The most conscientious catechists were refining their own techniques, with favourable results. John Ewing writes of the people of Rannoch:

many of them had not the Commands, & some had neither the Lord's Prayer, nor Creed, nor Commands, yet after all, I did not exclaime agst them, but praisd those yt could say something, and exhorted others civilly & kindly, for it's the best way to gain ym. I cannot say as yet, yt I found any Contumacious, or obstinat<sup>149</sup>

It is clear that Walter Morison, who we have met already being rabbled after preaching at St Ninian's Chapel, was learning caution. In a letter of 7 December 1726 the Rev. James Lautie, moderator of the Presbytery of Fordyce praised him "As a Person with whose Abilities, Managment and Prudent Behaviour, They own themselves to be more and more Satisfied, Yea even the Generality of the Dissaffected in that Country, Are obliged to give him a good testimony, And he has been already Instrumental in Reclaiming Severals from the Popish Errors, And Engadgeing some Disaffected Persons to Attend Gospel Ordinances".<sup>150</sup> Morison was

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<sup>147</sup> NAS, CH1/5/51, 150.

<sup>148</sup> NAS, CH1/5/51, 160.

<sup>149</sup> NAS, CH1/2/51, 308; cf. 310.

<sup>150</sup> NAS, CH1/5/51, 155.

thereupon given a rise in salary for his pains. In a later letter, written on 19 October 1727, he describes his methods. They are worth quoting in full for the details they give about how the cunning catechist went about his business:

Shewing that he had for sometime past been making as Narrow Observation in travelling among that People, as he could, and can say, with Confidence, Blessed be God, that matters begin to mend somewhat, tho' it's true there are not many reclaim'd from Popery, not above Nine, Since he came to that Place, Yet Apostacy is not now frequent, there not having been any Save One, and that ane Heretor against whom (after he would no ways hearken to, Yea not hear of Instruction, or Argument on that Point) Process is going on, That he the said Mr Morison in his last Travells ffound some more Success, ffor he had Access to Seven or Eight ffamilies of the Papists, who Joined in Prayer with Considerable Insinuations of Kindness, The Method he took, was not so much Directly to Attack their Errors by running them down as Errors, As by insisting on the Truths of the Christian Religion, where he had Sufficient Occasion in another form to do it, and by this way of doing, he found most of the Common People turning really Protestants in Many Points of our ffaith, and even those which are most ffundamental. Another way he used which he ffound very taking both with the Prelatical ffamilies and with Papists, was to take a Zealous Concern about their Children at Schools, and otherways by frequent Examining them there, and reporting to their Parents, By letting Pennys fall to the Young ones, and Complementing them with little Books, which for Ordinary he does, and hears them read, Examines them, and prescribes them Tasks of the Catechism, By which Means, there is Even an Emulation rising among Several of the Young People And our Catechism comes to be read, and Mandate by many Young ones, and old People hears it, and delights to hear their Children so perform, and ffinding this a very successful Mean, he inclines to improve it more and more, though it be with some Expences, He shews that there are many of the Common People Papists on the Confines where the throng of the Papists are, who plainly own it was the great distance from the

Church, that made them take the Nearest, Thus the Priests have improven Mightily, For to the two Priests and their Catechists who have for a Long time lived in good dwellings on the Confines of the said Parishes, another Priest from Fochabers is come, and taken up another house, upon another part of the Extremitys of these parishes, And that it is Lamentable that there they should have their Abodes, and that he has none, But is Obliged to travel at such a distance When Severals do declare that had they a near Occasion of a Protestant Kirk they would attend it<sup>151</sup>

Meanwhile, under rather trying circumstances, the newly ordained Rev. Archibald Bannatyne in Lochbroom had been doing his best:

to Reduce that People to order: And Besides the Catechist he had from the Committee, he had sent out other three to teach the People the Creed, the ten Commands, and some of the Questions of the Catechism; That he had got some stop to the Setting of Netts, Carrying of Loads, and travelling on the Lord's Day, Had prevailed with some Selected Persons in the Remote Corners of the Parish to Read the Scriptures, and tell the People the History of the Bible by way of Tale to their Neighbours upon Winter nights and Sabbath Days, and had Convinced the People how much it is their Duty and Interest to Attend thereunto; And he writes that he is hopefull that the good effect thereof may be Seen in a Competent time, But wanting a Maintainance he would be obliged to Raise a process, which he is affraid will Spoill all, and Living is dear in that Country, So that he is a very great object of Pity as now Stated.<sup>152</sup>

In its report to the General Assembly of May 1727, the Royal Bounty Committee stressed how necessary it was to keep a close eye on the missionaries employed. Many of the itinerant ministers in the first scheme had already been called to parishes; as a result, the committee was

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<sup>151</sup> NAS, CH1/5/51, 245.

<sup>152</sup> NAS, CH1/5/51, 165.



increasingly having to rely upon untried probationers and catechists. Especially recommended for support were the presbyteries of Gairloch, Abertarff and Lorn who had been most vocal in their complaints. But although the scheme had been in operation for two years, Roman Catholicism in the Gàidhealtachd appeared to be as robust as it had been previously, if not more so. Blaming a new generation of more able and educated priests, the resistance inspired by the Royal Bounty scheme, and growing divisions within the presbyteries themselves because of evangelical influence, Wodrow writes of how “the insolence and increase of Papists under this two years and a half last past administration is incredible.”<sup>153</sup>

Racked as it was by the controversy about Dr Simson, and with evangelical elements now demanding a national fast and the reprinting of both the Confession of Faith and the National Covenant, the exceptionally long 1727 General Assembly was not an easy one for the King’s Commissioner, the earl of Findlater: “There was never ane Assembly since the revolution more difficult to be managed for the whole hott, zealous party gott themselves elected upon the prosecution of Mr Simpstone”.<sup>154</sup> Given such a febrile atmosphere, it is hardly surprising that yet another briefing concerning the dangers of popery was presented to the authorities, along with previous memorials on the subject from the early 1720s. The problem of Catholicism, it was pointed out, was simply not being addressed effectively.

Frustrated in its aims, the Royal Bounty Committee took an even harder line than before, not only urging legal action against papists, but taking up the Presbytery of Lorn’s plea for military garrisons to protect projected new Protestant colonies. A special plea was made “That Persons well Acquainted with the Popish Controversies be named to go to these Countries where Popery does abound, both Ministers, Probationers and well Qualified

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<sup>153</sup> Wodrow, *Analecta*, iii, 423-4; NAS, CH1/1/31, 153-66, especially 157; cf. Wodrow, *Correspondence*, iii, 293, 294-5; Prunier, “Catholiques, presbytériens”, 238-41.

<sup>154</sup> PRO, SP54/18/14D; Skoczylas, *Mr Simson’s knotty case*, 280-7.

Catechists, to Remain for some time among them, To Instruct them in the Principles of the true Religion".<sup>155</sup> Meanwhile:

some of the Missionaries give it as their Opinion, That their Staying too short a time in One place, seems not so well to answer the design, But that Catechists especially should remain in one place till they had learn'd a competent number of the people therein, to repeat the Shorter Catechism, and to understand it in some measure, And that being done, One in a Family may help to learn another, which will make way for Ministers and Preachers doing the more good when they come to visite, Catechise and preach, And Ministers to baptise or perform other Duties of their Function; For it is not to be expected, that Ministers can stay so long in a family as to learn the people therein, the whole Catechism, But the Catechists may do it, And the longer they remain among a people, And the more intimate and familiar they are with them, They, if prudent have the better Access to do good, And thus in Winter Nights in houses, And in Summer in the Shealls, the people may be receiving Instruction with little diversion from their work, And so when the poor people can repeat part of the Catechism, and answer some Questions therein, it encourages both themselves and others to appear before the Minister, whereas when they can not do so, they are ashamed to attend, And if they do, and can say nothing, they are dash'd, and it discourages them & others present from attending the Means of Instruction.<sup>156</sup>

In effect, the Royal Bounty Committee, barred from using their funds to pay for teachers to educate Gaels directly, were trying furtively to transform their catechists into schoolmasters by the back door.

During the latter half of 1727 the Royal Bounty Committee continued to have problems with recruiting qualified missionaries for the project. It was having to fall back upon catechists, yet at the same time it had greatly

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<sup>155</sup> NAS, CH1/1/31, 163; CH1/2/55, fo. 243; CH1/5/51, 187, also 228-30; cf. EUL, Laing II 489/36/2.

<sup>156</sup> NAS, CH1/1/31, 163-4; CH1/5/51, 188.

overstretched its funds. Certainly, the committee boasted at that year's General Assembly that it had been able to reduce many catechists' salaries. The unpalatable consequence was that it was growing ever harder to recruit capable young men, many of them with young families, who were prepared to undergo the trials, tribulations and expense of working in rough country among a hostile population, and – most crucially of all – who were sufficiently qualified to pass the high criteria of the Royal Bounty Committee. Given such worries, the committee went so far as to have a bill printed in August advising presbyteries constantly to monitor the progress and standards of work of their catechists.<sup>157</sup> In a letter of 19 August 1727 the Rev. Donald MacLeod, moderator of the Presbytery of Long Island, represented “that it was impracticable to find out in that Country persons every way Qualified according to the Committee's regulations to Serve for so small Sallarys as what is allowed this Year”.<sup>158</sup> At the same meeting a letter of 4 October from Charles Stewart Clerk to the Presbytery of Kintyre was read, “Shewing that they have no Probationers in the Bounds of their Synod which makes them almost despair of getting one to send to Jura, And therefore proposing that Catechists may be sent upon the ffund designed for Probationers”.<sup>159</sup> On 26 October the Presbytery of Dornoch wrote that they were very disappointed that the catechist of Clyne and Kildonan was not receiving £10 any more, “and how much the poor man formerly Employ'd is discouraged being deprived of Bread for himself and ffamily without timeous Advertisement, and that none can serve for ffour or ffive Pound Sterling there”.<sup>160</sup> Certainly, there were a dozen young students with Gaelic who were applying for bursaries at this time, but although the General Assembly made up a list of the funds then operative, very few were actually available.<sup>161</sup>

The most pressing problem was continuing dissatisfaction among the ministers of the Synod of Glenelg, the foundation of which was the

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<sup>157</sup> NAS, CH1/2/59, fo. 106.

<sup>158</sup> NAS, CH1/5/51, 237.

<sup>159</sup> NAS, CH1/5/51, 239.

<sup>160</sup> NAS, CH1/5/51, 246.

<sup>161</sup> NAS, CH1/3/19, 151.

centrepiece of the great restructuring in the western Gàidhealtachd in 1724. For an isolated and overburdened clergy, the Royal Bounty grant was greatly welcome as evidence of official support: “Your Majesty’s concerning Your self in it gives life and vigour to our endeavours & is our greatest encouragement under God.”<sup>162</sup> However, the synod’s hopes were not to be fulfilled. Its main concern was that the recently-planted ministers of the Presbytery of Gairloch be paid their stipends. Relations had by now broken down completely between the clergy there and the local gentry, who were using their influence to alienate the tenantry as well.<sup>163</sup> At the General Assembly of 1727, on the day following the nomination of a new Royal Bounty Committee, the Presbytery of Gairloch had handed in a complaint, protesting that they had received scarcely any assistance from the appointed missionaries, that those who had arrived had barely been paid because of the great distance from Edinburgh, that given their isolation it was extremely inconvenient to get the relevant legal testificates for their choice of missionaries, that they had no support from civil magistrates, and that they had become objects of derision among their own parishioners.<sup>164</sup> Despite the great majority vote of the commission of the church to transport the Rev. Donald MacLeod from Contin to Lochalsh in the presbytery, even at the risk of offending Colin Mackenzie of Coul, one of staunchest supporters of the presbyterian church in Wester Ross, the ministers of the Presbytery of Gairloch continued to complain that the Edinburgh authorities were doing little or nothing to expedite the legal processes for their stipends. The situation was worsened by the “Vigorous Attempt made to pervert the Protestants in Kintail by Mr Alexander McCraw a Popish Priest who Resides in Straglass, where he has perverted upwards of Six hundred People”.<sup>165</sup> The jesuit priest Alexander Macrae was ideal for the Catholic

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<sup>162</sup> PRO, SP54/17/9B.

<sup>163</sup> NAS, CH1/2/55, fos. 327-8; /57, fos. 248-9.

<sup>164</sup> NAS, CH1/1/31, 212-16; CH1/3/19, 103.

<sup>165</sup> NAS, CH1/3/19, 104-5, 138-9; CH1/5/51, 143-4, 163, 219; cf. CH1/2/53, fos. 226-40; /59, fo. 35; CH2/92/4, 177-8, 186-8, 194-5, 200-1, 215-17, 233, 238, 243; /5, 18, 32, 36, 73, 81-2, 90-1, 119, 125, 129, 133, 144-5, 149-50, 155, 156-7, 160, 161, 164-7, 171-6; CH2/312/2, 133, 358; /3, 9, 24-5, 113-14; NLS, MS 1334 fos. 111, 121; *Fasti*, vii, 155.



cause in Kintail, being a member of the dominant kindred in the district. According to a letter from the Synod of Glenelg of 11 July 1727, he had won:

An Auditory of some Scores of People in that Parish, and had baptised several Children according to the Rites of the Church of Rome, And that there are Several Families transported from Straglass a Popish Country to Kintail, And that if some stop be not put thereto, This Jesuit and his Abettors will in a short time diffuse the Poison of his Idolatrous Religion, through the bounds of the Presb of Gairloch, where the people are generally very ignorant<sup>166</sup>

The Presbytery of Gairloch also found itself under threat from episcopalian missionary work coordinated by the Rev. Angus Morison, brother of the famous poet An Clàrsair Dall, the Blind Harper. Something of an old rogue, *Aonghas Dubh*'s barbed, earthy wit and gift for extempore verse assured him entry and influence in all the big houses in the district.<sup>167</sup>

By the winter of 1727 Archibald Bannatyne was in desperate circumstances: "having no House he was obliged to Lodge with a poor Smith, and like to lose his Eyes with Smoake, and so at last Necessitate to build a feal-house in the Midle of Winter".<sup>168</sup> If no support was forthcoming within two years, the minister declared he would leave his parish. The constant barrage of complaints from members of the Synod of Glenelg,

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<sup>166</sup> NAS, CH1/3/19, 138; cf. CH1/5/51, 219, 227, 234, 255, 256, 281-2; CH2/567/1, 57; CH2/568/1, 27; NLS, MS 1334 fo. 76; Alexander Macrae, *History of the Clan Macrae* (Dingwall, 1899), 72-3; Alexander S. MacWilliam, "A Highland mission: Strathglass, 1671-1777", *IR*, 24 (1973), 86-95; Alasdair Roberts, "Catholic Kintail: a marginal community", *TGSI*, 58 (1992-4), 127; Doran, "Bishop Thomas Nicolson and the Roman Catholic mission", 92-3.

<sup>167</sup> NAS, CH1/5/51, 47, 133, 139, 151-2, 280-1; CH2/92/4, 195-6, 200, 206-7, 211-12, 214-15, 226; CH2/312/2, 105-6, 155, 160-2; NLS, MS 1334 fos. 53, 87v.; cf. MacDonald, *Morrison Manuscript*, 168-9, 174-5, 192-4, 322-4; William Matheson (ed.), *The Blind Harper* (Edinburgh, 1970), 196, 223-6; Ó Baoill and MacAulay (eds.), *Scottish Gaelic vernacular verse*, no.353.

<sup>168</sup> NAS, CH1/5/51, 166; cf. 162-3, 163-6.

above all the “Clamorous Letters” written by the indefatigable Rev. Aeneas Sage, berating the Royal Bounty Committee for its lack of support certainly had an effect.<sup>169</sup> In April 1728, in their report to the forthcoming General Assembly, the committee members advised that the scheme should be restructured: preachers and catechists should be withdrawn from smaller parishes with few Roman Catholics in their bounds, “and that a Special Regard be had To the Bounds of the New Synod of Glenelg, Where Parishes are very Large, and Severals of them Vacant, and Where Popery and Ignorance does most abound, and Ministers have Small Stipends and Want Parochial Schools, and are under many Grievances and great discouragements”.<sup>170</sup> Special stress was laid on the absence of legal support for the missionaries.<sup>171</sup> Embroiled once more in the Simson affair, the General Assembly was restless. The accession of George II, and the expected remoulding of the political landscape in its wake, gave an excuse to forward yet another memorial concerning the growth of popery, once more accompanied by similar reports from the beginning of the decade.<sup>172</sup> The “Special Regard” for the Synod of Glenelg was agreed to in the Royal Bounty scheme for 1728 drawn up on 22 May, and an entire day was spent on its demands. Indeed, so much money was given to the synod that “there will be a Necessity to Reduce part of what was granted formerly to some places, and withdraw wholly what was given to some others.”<sup>173</sup> However, within barely six months the committee and the Synod of Glenelg would be almost at daggers drawn.

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<sup>169</sup> NAS, CH1/2/70, fo. 349; also fos. 287-9, 292-9, 306-7, 309-10, 316-17, 345, 347, 351; CH1/5/51, 174, 175, 236, 243, 263-5, 268-9.

<sup>170</sup> NAS, CH1/5/51, 277-8; cf. 203, 209; CH1/1/31, 410-28.

<sup>171</sup> NAS, CH1/5/51, 282-8.

<sup>172</sup> PRO, SP14/18/25A, /25B, /25D; NAS, CH1/3/19, 184-92; cf. Wodrow, *Analecta*, iii, 442-3, 497; Black, *Walpole in power*, 30-2.

<sup>173</sup> NAS, CH1/5/51, 298; cf. 307, 329-32; CH1/3/19, 165-6.

### A partnership with the SSPCK?

During the latter half of 1728 the Royal Bounty Committee further tightened its rules, mainly because of what had happened when the 1727 accounts were presented to the government auditors, the Barons of the Exchequer. The barons promptly and rather maliciously – for the first time ever – refused to ratify them, on the grounds that the committee had (mis)used some of the Royal Bounty to pay retainers to the clerk, the doorkeeper, and for stationery expenses. The Exchequer's rebuff may not have been unconnected with the committee's constant lobbying on behalf of the Presbytery of Gairloch. In some confusion, the Royal Bounty Committee decided to attempt to draw these personal honoraria out of an already existing £500 church fund, a gambit which proved successful the following year. The committee was obviously somewhat apprehensive about the state of their accounts, however, and stressed to presbyteries that the relevant certificates and receipts must be received before the 1 December 1728, "Seing at that time The Committee's Accounts to be Revised and Errors therein or Mismanagment may Reflect on the Church, and be the Occasion of Withdrawing this ffund."<sup>174</sup>

While a delegation from the committee argued its case with the Barons of Exchequer, the latter made the suggestion that "also it might be humbly desired, that his Majesty would allow some part of this ffund of One Thousand Pounds Sterling, to be bestowed for Charity Schools, which was formerly Demanded."<sup>175</sup> As has been seen, the committee was certainly not averse to the idea, having made just such a proposal at the General Assembly two years previously. With the 1728 scheme expending much of the Royal Bounty for the bounds of the Synod of Glenelg, new corners had to be cut in other areas of the Gàidhealtachd. One way of negotiating this increasingly pressing problem was to try to make local SSPCK schoolmasters catechise for the Royal Bounty during weekends, but without pay, an obviously

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<sup>174</sup> NAS, CH1/5/51, 322-7, 332.

<sup>175</sup> NAS, CH1/5/51, 322.

unsatisfactory solution nevertheless resorted to in the schemes for the presbyteries of Kincardine O'Neil, Fordyce, Aberlour and Abernethy.<sup>176</sup>

The Royal Bounty Committee composed a memorial to the Barons of the Exchequer, in which the members requested that the barons try to secure a change in the terms of the royal grant to allow it to educate as well as to preach and catechise. The language used, and the vehemently anti-Gaelic ideology lying behind it, was not at all representative of the committee's memorials hitherto; it was, however, characteristic of the SSPCK:

And because it is Evident that the teaching the People in the highlands and Islands to read the Scriptures in the English Language is the only solid Foundation of all ffuture Instruction in Christian Knowledge and will tend to Extirpate the Irish Language, which much Obstructs the Civilizing of that People Therefore the Committee also begs, that Your Lordships will be Pleas'd to Procure, That the Maintaining of Charity Schools in the Highlands and Islands, and furnishing Necessary Books for Teaching them to read the Scriptures, and understand the Principles of the Protestant Reform'd Religion, may be Added to the Purposes for which the said Royal Bounty is bestow'd<sup>177</sup>

The barons replied on 12 July 1728. It was not for them, they said, to apply for changes in the terms of the grant; rather, it was a matter for the Church of Scotland, to be discussed either at its quarterly Commission, or at the annual General Assembly. After lengthy discussion, the committee decided not to reapply to the church for an alteration in the original grant; rather, moves were taken towards a even closer rapprochement with the SSPCK:

And that as to maintaining of Schools in the Highlands and Islands the places most needing the same this Committee shall keep a Correspondence thereanent with the Society for Propagating Christian Knowledge, and their Committee and Concert Measures, about their School-

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<sup>176</sup> NAS, CH1/5/51, 311, 312, 314.

<sup>177</sup> NAS, CH1/5/51, 326-7.



masters being employed as Catechists upon the Saturdays & Lord's Day and other times when their Scholars are not at School and that this Committee Grant some Allowance to them, upon that head.<sup>178</sup>

In a memorial to General Wade composed in August 1728, once more requesting military help to apprehend Catholic priests, and asking for his personal support in strengthening government authority in the Gàidhealtachd, the Royal Bounty Committee closely followed the party line of the SSPCK – indeed, the society subscribed the document, in which it was accorded high praise:

The Abovementioned Society have now for Near twenty Years past had many Schools Scattered in the Most Barbarous Corners, which have had Desireable Success in teaching the Rising Generation Reading, Writing, Arithmetick, and the Principles of Religion, Virtue and Loyalty, and likewise to Speak the English Language; great Care is taken by them, that such as they Employ to teach, be well Affected to his Majesty, and his Illustrious Royal Protestant ffamily. The Judicatorys likewise of this Church, have very Carefully Laboured to Procure Legal Schools to be Erected in many Parishes of the Highlands, where there were never any Schools before, and are still going on, to obtain More, But the Reforming and Civilizing the Highlands and Islands, will be a Work of time, It is now happily begun, and if the helps already Afforded be continued and some other things that are hereafter humbly Propos'd be granted, it will make a Remarkable tho' Gradual Progress to the Strengthening of his Majesty's Govt Notwithstanding the Restless Endeavours of it's Enemies who deall in their Power to Oppose and Retard it. These Schools, and other Means of Instruction spoken of, will through the Blessing of God in Due time Remove the Ignorance & Barbarity of the Poorer Sort, But it is a Loss that for further improving these of a higher Rank and of more than

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<sup>178</sup> NAS, CH1/5/51, 333-4.

Ordinary pregnant Spirits, there are not some few Grammar Schools set up, in the most Populous Places.<sup>179</sup>

In fact, the Royal Bounty Committee had already begun, somewhat stealthily, to cooperate with the SSPCK. Even with a joint mission funded by the two bodies and by local landowners, it was proving difficult to keep catechists in the wild and remote district of Rannoch. In July 1728 two letters arrived in Edinburgh from Aeneas Sage, one to the committee, the other to the SSPCK, recommending that John MacLean, catechist in Lochcarron, be sent to fill the latest vacancy there. Given that three months previously MacLean had “been found guilty of furnication” at a meeting of the presbytery, Sage was evidently trying to disencumber the local church of an embarrassing employee, and at the same time punish the hapless catechist.<sup>180</sup> The Presbytery of Dunkeld already had a local candidate in mind for Rannoch, so at their meeting on 25 July the Royal Bounty committee suggested that MacLean might be usefully employed in “the popish parts of Glenelg”, in other words, Knoydart. The following day, at a committee meeting of the SSPCK, a proposal was mooted. It had been heard that the Royal Bounty Committee were considering employing society schoolmasters as catechists. It was therefore proposed that the society might be prepared to pay £5 of MacLean’s salary in order that he might work as a teacher as well, on condition that the Royal Bounty Committee saw fit to make the like sum available for one of the society’s schoolmasters who had the greatest salary. The Royal Bounty Committee appear to have assented.<sup>181</sup> In other words, the committee were prepared to indulge in some rather sharp practice to avoid their accountants, in order both to enable properly-funded and effective mission work in what was seen to be one of the more vulnerable Catholic areas, and at the same time to demonstrate their commitment to the fractious Synod of Glenelg.

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<sup>179</sup> NAS, CH1/5/51, 347; cf. 333.

<sup>180</sup> NAS, CH2/567/1, 68-9; cf. CH1/5/51, 310, 319, 338.

<sup>181</sup> NAS, CH1/5/51, 338; GD95/1/3, 73; /2/4, 99, 106.

The Knoydart mission made no progress, as Rev. Murdo MacLeod of Glenelg explained in a letter of 12 December, “Seing Neither Minister, nor Catechist, can get any of the People there, to join so much as in Prayer, And if any do Express the least inclination towards the Protestant Religion, the Gentlmen Concerned would soon find a tacite Way to Ruin these who would give the least Countenance to the Protestant Interest”.<sup>182</sup> The following month the evidently unsuitable John MacLean was complaining to the committee that Aeneas Sage had held back part of his salary, and in the following year’s scheme it was attempted quietly to palm him off on the people of Tiree, a ruse rejected by their minister, the Rev. John MacLean, ostensibly on the grounds that a man from Lochcarron “had not the Irish language in its proprietie, and then he could not be usefull here”, but in reality because “he was not of an enexceptionable character. Which I’ve understood more fullie since.”<sup>183</sup>

The committee were not the only ones, however, who were planning changes in the rules of the Royal Bounty Committee. At that very same meeting as the joint memorial was composed for General Wade, the members received a seemingly innocent letter from Rev. Donald MacLeod moderator of the Synod of Glenelg. The minister requested that a copy of the original Royal Grant and the committee’s rules be sent them as soon as possible. Suspecting nothing, the committee complied with MacLeod’s request.<sup>184</sup>

### **Double dealing by the Synod of Glenelg**

In fact, for some time the Synod of Glenelg had been running out of patience with the Royal Bounty Committee. The first hint that its attitude to the committee was fast deteriorating comes in a rather cantankerous letter written by the Rev. Aeneas Sage to Professor Hamilton – and pointedly not to the committee – on 6 September 1728. Once more Sage complained about the unpaid ministerial stipends owed to him, but this time hinted that the reason that legal pressure was not being brought to bear upon the recalcitrant heritors was that the agent of the church, Nicol Spence, was

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<sup>182</sup> NAS, CH1/5/51, 404; cf. 353; CH2/567/1, 94; GD95/1/3, 96-7.

<sup>183</sup> NAS, CH1/5/51, 407-8, 420; CH1/2/59, fo. 153.

<sup>184</sup> NAS, CH1/5/51, 350-1.

simply not doing his job. Spence defended himself spiritedly, alleging that to some extent it was Sage's own unreasonable desire to push back the augmentation of his stipend right to the date of his admission which was to blame for the delay. There were only two Barons of Exchequer in Scotland all last winter, meaning that they were not quorate to grant petitions, while the process was now being considered by the Lord Advocate "As his other Weighty Affairs will Allow". All of Sage's process was being paid for out of the public purse, even the minister's own travelling expenses, a sum amounting to nearly £200.<sup>185</sup>

Later on during the same meeting, on 15 November 1728, the committee were presented with some rather surprising information, namely "that the Synod of Glenelg hath a Strong Inclination, to have the Kings Bounty turned out of the Present Channel and Apply'd for Annual New Erections [of parishes] and that a Memorial was given to General Wade at Fort William to Procure Countenance to it at Court".<sup>186</sup> Astonished that the synod had been intriguing behind its back, the committee reacted angrily. An emergency meeting was summoned in three days' time; all lawyers on the committee were urged to attend. The committee were far from happy with the synod's project, and "Did judge that Motion very improper, and Unseasonable, and also Disrespectful to the General Assembly, it's Commission and Committees, who Petition'd for that Bounty to be employ'd in the Manner it now is, and that they should have been Acquainted before any such Motion had been made". Not only was the motion disrespectful, it showed "a Dissatisfaction with the Method Graciously Propos'd in his Majestys Royal Grant, after it was sought in that Manner by this Church, and may have a Tendency to Withdraw the same."<sup>187</sup> Ten days later, the subcommittee brought in a draft of a letter to the synod, recalling that they had asked for a copy of the Royal Grant, and wherein they thought it "Exceeding Strange that You did not Judge it proper to Communicate Your Design to them, who (by Delegation from the General Assembly of this Church Your

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<sup>185</sup> NAS, CH1/5/51, 359-61, cf. 263, 353-4; CH1/2/59, fos. 45-8; CH1/3/19, 204, 224-5.

<sup>186</sup> NAS, CH1/5/51, 373.

<sup>187</sup> NAS, CH1/5/51, 374, 375.



Superior Judicatory are intrusted with the Managment of that Bounty) before You made an Attempt to introduce so great an Alteration in a Matter that Nearly Concerns the Interest of Religion, Regard to his Majesty, and the Honour of this Whole Church.”<sup>188</sup> The Royal Bounty Committee, obviously in high dudgeon, was quite merciless to the Synod of Glenelg, bringing the full weight of its authority to bear upon them:

It was a great Adventure, and a most improper and unseasonable one in so small a Number as your Synod Consists of, or in their Committee, or any Presbytery in Your Bounds, to take upon them to Counterwork the General Assembly and their Commission, to the Prejudice of other Eight Synods as Considerable as you, who have an Interest in the Matter. When the Committee have Weighed the many bad Consequences that must Necessarily Attend this New Project, They have Reason to think that the first Movers thereof, are either not friendly to this Glorious Work, and judge this a likely Way to Marr it, and no doubt it will prove so, Or if friendly, they have not duly Considered all the disadvantages of that Proposal<sup>189</sup>

The committee’s letter was accompanied by another memorial to General Wade. Given the widely scattered population in the Highlands, and the impossibility of carrying the heritors along in such a scheme, it urged the general to reject the proposals of the Synod of Glenelg, and to support the Royal Bounty scheme as it stood.<sup>190</sup>

However, it had been local heritors themselves who had first suggested the scheme to the Synod of Glenelg nearly two years previously, a proposal the committee had then recommended be pursued at the General Assembly. Indeed, the original idea that Royal Bounty funds be used to pay parish stipends had in fact been mooted in the original lobbying for the scheme.<sup>191</sup> The Synod of Glenelg had floated the idea the previous year, when it was

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<sup>188</sup> NAS, CH1/5/51, 377.

<sup>189</sup> NAS, CH1/5/51, 379.

<sup>190</sup> NAS, CH1/5/51, 379-86.

<sup>191</sup> NAS, CH1/3/17, 241, 317, 358; CH1/5/51, 163-4, 219.

submitted that half the fund might be reallocated to pay for the splitting of large, unwieldy parishes into more manageable units. At their annual meeting, on 19 June 1728, the synod had appointed a committee to draw up a scheme for the better employing of the Royal Bounty, and to correspond with other neighbouring synods on the subject – evidently this was how the proposal leaked to the Royal Bounty Committee in Edinburgh.<sup>192</sup> In January it came to light that the author of the report was Rev. James Gilchrist of Kilmallie.<sup>193</sup>

Although evidently a competent minister who acted as a conduit for his Presbytery of Abertarff in its dealings with the authorities, for some time Gilchrist had evidently felt under siege in his huge and unwieldy parish, the largest in the country. Thronged by priests, oppressed by the local gentry, unsupported by the authorities, the minister was by now apparently at loggerheads both with Mr George Anderson, catechist in Fort William, and his neighbour the Rev. John Skeldoch in Kilmonivaig. The Uist priest Father Neil MacFie had recently returned from Rome to invigorate the nascent Catholic church on the braes of Loch Arkaig, a task doubtless expedited thanks to the surname he shared with many in the district. The Catholic church had been further strengthened in Lochaber as a result, and in Autumn 1728 Coll MacDonell of Keppoch himself had finally confessed to a clandestine thirty-year allegiance to the faith.<sup>194</sup> The Royal Bounty Committee record that Gilchrist wrote a letter to them on 4 April 1729, in which he defends himself:

He says it was no Application to the Government, Only an Unsign'd Memorial, giving the General a thought, which Perhaps might be new, and which he was to make, what use of he Pleas'd, And the said Mr Gilchrist owns he was the Writer thereof, and, except that that Scheme

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<sup>192</sup> NAS, CH2/568/1, 37; cf. CH2/312/3, 65.

<sup>193</sup> NAS, CH1/5/51, 402.

<sup>194</sup> NAS, CH1/5/51, 369-70; CH1/3/17, 531; /19, 23-4, 54-9, 67-70; CH1/5/51, 135, 243, 400, 449-50; CH1/2/53, 237-8; CH2/7/1, 3, 4-5, 9, 10, 11-12, 18, 35-7, 56; GD95/2/4, 76-8; SCA, BL2/309/4, /13-14; /315/16; CC1/14, 2191; cf. McHugh, "Religious condition", 15-16, 18.

is Agreeable to his Own Sentiments, the Writing of that Paper, is all the hand he had in it. It was at the Desire of a Certain Gentleman that he wrote it<sup>195</sup>

Whatever support the Synod's idea might have had among local landowners, the government was firmly on the side of the Royal Bounty Committee.<sup>196</sup> The upshot was that relations between the committee and the Synod of Glenelg – supposedly their greatest beneficiaries – became positively glacial, the more so in that the committee, evidently set on pursuing their grudge to the bitter end, insisted on taking the affair before the General Assembly of 1729.<sup>197</sup> The Assembly disapproved of the synod's memorial, and that was an end to the matter, at least as far as the committee was concerned. But a basic split, even a lack of trust on both sides, had been exposed. The committee believed that their own competency was being impugned by the synod in an underhand manner, while the synod objected to the "High Stile and unusual Spirit" adopted by the committee which appeared to treat the Highland clergy in a haughty and condescending manner, apparently as no more than "meer Cyphers in the Management of its publick affairs". The synod's final letter ended:

If your R[everend] B[rothers] cannot bear, that outlandish Synods or Presbyteries should dissent from them, or propose any new Overture, tho' in matters they have best access to know, they may as well exclude them from any Share in the Government of the Church<sup>198</sup>

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<sup>195</sup> NAS, CH1/5/51, 450; cf. 417-18; CH1/2/53, fos. 237-8; /59, fos. 83-4.

<sup>196</sup> NAS, CH1/5/51, 391-2, 403, 408, 415.

<sup>197</sup> NAS, CH1/5/51, 420, 422, 436-46, 460-1, 512-13; CH1/2/59 fos. 28v.-29.

<sup>198</sup> NAS, CH1/2/59, fos. 54, 259, 259v.; CH1/5/51, 502-3. The justice of the synod's claims was somewhat undermined by the roundabout way the letter was forwarded to the committee: *ibid.* fo. 260: "this letter was delivered by Angus Bethun July 12 1729, had it from Angus Bethun, minr in Trotternish who left Edenb some tym in June last & directed ye said Angus not to deliver this letter till ye beginning of July & to deliver it to Mr Jo: Walker Minr in Canongate."

As for the luckless Rev. James Gilchrist, it appears as if the Royal Bounty Committee were determined, for a while at least, to make an example of him. In 1728 he had at last secured a catechist to preach and instruct the people of Loch Arkaig: "The People Glad of This & Depending on the Certainty of it did so many of Them as had their Dwellings farthest from the Place where it was agreed the School should be built, remove their houses as near to that Place as they could".<sup>199</sup> The committee withdrew their offer and did not answer Gilchrist's letters, thereby dealing the minister's already shaky credibility with his parishioners another blow. Although he and the committee did eventually reach a rapprochement, what appears to be sharp practice by local heritors hindering the minister from collecting his stipend at the end of 1729 led to further difficulties, and in June of the following year James Gilchrist eventually demitted his post and left for the altogether less demanding parish of Loth in Sutherland.<sup>200</sup>

### **A solution to the crisis?**

Nevertheless, the affair of the Synod of Glenelg had clearly shown up the inadequacy of the Royal Bounty scheme as it was then being administered. It simply wasn't working. Despite their clamant circumstances, the Presbyteries of Gairloch and Abertarff had received little or no concrete support from the fund; whatever the good intentions, ministers and catechists were simply not prepared to preach in their bounds. Both sides, committee and synod alike, were convinced of the need to encourage resident preachers and catechists in the community. Yet a scheme by which itinerant preachers were peremptorily ordered to leave their home for an uncertain, uncomfortable and even dangerous three months among hostile strangers was hardly satisfactory. Something had to be done. The Synod of Glenelg had proposed using the Royal Bounty to increase the number of resident ministers; the Royal Bounty Committee preferred to keep the scheme as close as possible to its original aims. In a letter of 16 November 1728, General Wade – who possibly sympathised with Gilchrist – advised that

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<sup>199</sup> NAS, CH1/2/59, fo. 83; cf. also GD95/1/3, 59.

<sup>200</sup> NAS, CH1/2/59, fo. 262; also fos. 55-6, 70-1; CH1/5/51, 398-9, 400-1, 449-51; CH2/7/1, 61; /567/1, 104; EUL, Laing II 484/17; *Fasti*, vii, 157.



an annual bounty scheme could not be used to employ full-time established teachers.<sup>201</sup> However, over the next few months, during its war of letters with the Synod of Glenelg, the Royal Bounty Committee quietly extended its existing cooperation with the SSPCK. The two bodies discussed restructuring the allocation of the society's schools with the view of concentrating them even more heavily within the bounds of the Synod of Glenelg: the only way, it appeared, to ensure resident catechists in the region.<sup>202</sup> It appears that, primarily in order to mollify and give immediate support to the most beleaguered and outspoken presbyteries, clandestine steps were taken towards the joint-funding of four catechist-schoolmasters, one for Gairloch and three for Abertarff.<sup>203</sup> However, a greater change was about to take place.

From the mid-1720s the government in London had taken a much more direct interest in the affairs of the General Assembly. However, it was finding it an increasingly burdensome task to manage the strident evangelical elements in the Assembly, radicalised by their long struggle against local episcopalian ministers, as well as by the more recent Simson controversy. The government was unable and unwilling to appease them, and the dispute would culminate in the secession of Ebenezer Erskine and his followers in 1733. With regard to the Royal Bounty scheme, the £1000 grant had been a useful tool to demonstrate to the Assembly the government's commitment to funding reform, but growing disaffection in an increasingly radical and disputatious church meant that awkward questions were being raised about how useful the money had actually been. Divisions within the church had been inflamed after letters about the Simson case had been sent out to all the presbyteries, and the 1729 General Assembly was fully occupied with the controversy.<sup>204</sup> Proposals about the use of the Royal Bounty were hardly

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<sup>201</sup> NAS, CH1/5/51, 387; GD95/1/3, 101-2; /2/4, 110, 113, 129, 137.

<sup>202</sup> NAS, GD95/1/3, 92, 96-7, 102; /2/4, 100-1, 111, 112, 122, 129, 147, 148.

<sup>203</sup> NAS, GD95/2/4, 147, 148; CH1/5/51, 401-3, 404, 408; CH2/7/1, 61; note the SSPCK's creation of a London lobby in early 1729: GD95/1/3, 99, 108, 112, 115, 122, 125.

<sup>204</sup> Skoczylas, *Mr Simson's knotty case*, 11-12, 313-33, 346; cf. Wodrow, *Correspondence* iii, 291; PRO, SP54/19/67-9; Black, *Walpole in power*, 154.

the most important matter on the agenda, but could nevertheless be a cause of embarrassment. It appears that a potentially inadmissible radical revision of the grant was quietly bundled through by committee.<sup>205</sup>

At the 1729 General Assembly the Royal Bounty Committee pursued its aim of partnership with the SSPCK, asking – as it was rather coyly put – “the Addition only of dispersing Books & Encouraging Schools.”<sup>206</sup> The General Assembly, taken up with the Simson case, agreed not only to allow it to make its own decisions, but, in a coup for the committee, also demanded that the Synod of Argyll supply a detailed account of how it had spent the teinds of the Bishops’ Rents of Argyll and the Isles, with the vacant stipends thereof, since the monies had been earmarked for the synod after the Revolution settlement. These funds, intended mainly for educational purposes, had long been a bone of contention between the Argyll clergy and the Synod of Glenelg.<sup>207</sup>

On 29 May 1729 the subcommittee let it be known that, seeing demand for the Royal Bounty was so high, they should correspond with the SSPCK and bring in a report accordingly. A month later, the report was ready. It recommended that:

the Committee should Resolve in Concert with the said Society, to give Commissions to several of the Masters settled in the said Schools, to be Catechists for Catechising the People in these Places upon three Days of the Week, namely Each Lord’s Day, Each Saturday and each Munday, both forenoon and Afternoon, and to allow such Catechists for their Annual Service this say a Sum not exceeding Ten Pounds Sterling Per Annum to be paid to the said Schoolmasters at two Terms of the Year Vizt Whitsunday and Martinmass, beginning the first Term’s Payment at Whitsunday 1730 for the half Year Preceeding<sup>208</sup>

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<sup>205</sup> PRO, SP54/18/69D.

<sup>206</sup> NAS, CH1/5/51, 461; cf. 415, 426, 430.

<sup>207</sup> NAS, CH1/2/59, fo. 30; CH1/5/51, 97, 412, 415, 456, 462-3, 473, 475; CH2/557/5, 348, 361-2; /6, 15, 22-3, 35-7; CH2/568/1, 5-6, 29, 36-7, 47-9; SC54/22/44/2; E424.

<sup>208</sup> NAS, CH1/5/51, 485; cf. 483.

For their part, the SSPCK were prepared to settle schools in proper and needful places at the committee's request. The society's own committee was ordered to cooperate with the Royal Bounty Committee as

soon as possible in order to select suitable places and candidates:

When the said Society and this Committee have Agreed upon a Certain Number of Wel Qualified Persons to be their Respective Schoolmasters and Catechists and Concerted the Proper Places of their Settlements That the said Persons should for Distinction's sake be thus Design'd in the several Minutes of Register Vizt The Catechists jointly employ'd by the Society for Propagating Christian Knowledge and this Committee.<sup>209</sup>

The jointly employed catechist-schoolmaster, receiving half his salary from the SSPCK for his teaching duties, and the other half from the Royal Bounty Committee for catechising, was certainly not a new creation in 1729. But it was the first year in which this job share, as it were, was officially sanctioned. The category of catechist-schoolmaster was by no means the largest in the 1729 Royal Bounty scheme: 46 of them in all, as opposed to 60 itinerant preachers. However, there was no doubt which group was the more cost-effective: 46 catechists, whose salary was shared with the SSPCK, cost the Royal Bounty only £249; 60 missionaries, on the other hand, cost £818. When it was found that some £59 was left over from the previous year, the Royal Bounty Committee, tellingly, chose to fund 11 more of the new joint catechist-schoolmasters.

## Conclusion

The subsequent alliance between the Royal Bounty Committee and the SSPCK would last more than a generation. Although the partnership was not always an easy one, through cooperation with the Royal Bounty scheme the SSPCK were able to spread their influence far beyond what would have been the case had they relied solely on their own resources. Granted,

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<sup>209</sup> NAS, CH1/5/51, 486.

many, indeed most members of the Royal Bounty Committee also attended meetings of the SSPCK; but the Royal Bounty funds were not originally intended to be used – overtly at least – towards well-defined ideological ends other than the basics of preaching the gospel, encouraging loyalty, and combatting Roman Catholicism and episcopalianism. The SSPCK, on the other hand, had over their twenty years' existence evolved a very specific picture of their ideal Highlands: it goes without saying that antipathy towards Gaelic language and culture formed a fundamental part of the society's vision. Henceforth the SSPCK would be able to prosecute its cultural as well as its religious and political agenda throughout the region with the assistance of official funds.

At the same time, collaboration between Royal Bounty and SSPCK led to a great extension in the missionary effort, both within and without the Gàidhealtachd, and in much smaller and isolated communities than beforehand. For the Catholic church, the fresh escalation of presbyterian missionary activity was a further blow to an institution already demoralised by the death at the end of 1728 of its greatest patron, Alexander, duke of Gordon, and the delivering of his heir into the hands of protestant tutors.<sup>210</sup> An attempt by Colin Campbell, erstwhile leader of the Catholic church in the Highlands, to extend the missionary field into the Island of Mull under the tutelage of his brother had met with violent, and officially-condoned, resistance.<sup>211</sup> Apparently facing imminent disaster, Highland priests not only renewed claims for their own bishop, but demanded a much more radical allocation of authority and funds in the Scottish mission. In the resulting jansenist controversy which convulsed the Scottish Catholic church for the following decade, there is no doubt but that injured ambition and

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<sup>210</sup> NAS, CH1/3/19, 256-7; CH1/5/51, 397, 409, 429, 458-9, 479, 483-4; CH1/2/59, fos. 36-43; CH2/342/5, 120; GD44/43/17/88; SCA, BL2/316/10; /318/2, /7; /319/4-5; /320, /2, /5, /15-16; /321/1, /4, /9-10; /322/1-3, /12, /15; PRO, SP54/19/49-51, /114; TM/2, 172-3; Anson, *Underground Catholicism*, 125; Forbes Leith, *Memoirs*, ii, 311-3, 316; Watts, *Hugh MacDonald*, 59-60; idem, *Scalan*, 63.

<sup>211</sup> NAS, CH1/5/51, 366-7; CH2/557/6, 22-3; SCA, BL2/311/14(1), /17; /315/8, /320/11, /13; CC1/10, 838-9, 846; /14, 1981; TM/2, 156-7, 167; Bellesheim, *History*, iv, 383-8; Forbes Leith, *Memoirs*, ii, 315-16; MacDonald, "Ireland and Scotland", 586-7.



personal animus played their part. However, the Highland priesthood were by now quite disillusioned both with the near-farcical attempts to select a bishop over the previous five years, and Bishop Gordon's somewhat imprudent attitude towards funding, being neither willing to press for more, nor to supervise an equitable distribution of what there was. They were not necessarily in the wrong.<sup>212</sup>

Again, the rôle of General Wade must be stressed. The authority wielded by the general as effective Highland satrap meant that an opportunity was opened for the church to lobby for direct state-sanctioned action against Roman Catholics in the region, bypassing the usual legal and political channels. Later in the decade, however, at least one discontented local minister thought that he could lobby Wade – possibly with the general's own encouragement – in order to leapfrog unresponsive church authorities in Edinburgh and open up a direct line with court and government in London.

It will be clear that the difficulties faced by the Catholic church in the Gàidhealtachd are analogous to those undergone by the Synod of Argyll. To extend their mission fields into an inhospitable and often dangerous region, both churches required vigorous, motivated, argumentative, self-confident and stubborn men. The best evangelists, however, were often the most impossible colleagues. The great Aeneas Sage, for instance, appears to have been utterly insufferable to other members of the Presbytery of Gairloch, being in part responsible for driving away both Archibald

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<sup>212</sup> SCA, BL2/321/8; /322/11; Anson, *Underground Catholicism*, 131-43; Bellesheim, *History*, iv, 200-11; Dorrian, "Hugh MacDonald", 106-28; Forbes Leith, *Memoirs*, ii, 317-19; Halloran, *Scots College Paris*, 71, 102-48, 150-1, 154-6, 161-2, 196-8; James F. McMillan, "Thomas Innes and the bull 'Unigenitus'", *IR*, 33 (1982), 23-30; idem, "The root of all evil?: money and the Scottish Catholic mission in the eighteenth century", *Studies in Church History*, 24 (1987), 267-82; idem, "Jansenists and anti-jansenists in eighteenth-century Scotland: the Unigenitus quarrels in the Scottish Catholic mission", *IR*, 39 (1988), 12-45; idem, "Development 1707-1820" in Raymond McCluskey (ed.), *The Scots College Rome 1600-2000* (Edinburgh, 2000), 45-9; Watts, *Hugh MacDonald*, 78-9, 82-95; idem, *Scalan*, 69-83.

Bannatyne and James Smith to other pastures.<sup>213</sup> One sentiment which was widespread among missionaries on both sides, however, was resentment of their high-handed Lowland paymasters. Labouring in a demanding and hostile region, often risking not only their health for their faith but their very lives, ministers, catechists and priests alike felt neglected and misunderstood. Whether in Edinburgh, Paris or Rome, the ecclesiastical authorities were incapable of negotiating the bureaucratic networks of church and state quickly enough to satisfy their needs, but reacted angrily and somewhat overbearingly when alternative arrangements were suggested. A fundamental lack of sympathy and of trust lies at the root of the problem, an inability fully to assimilate the new rising generation of Gaelic missionaries into the institutions on equal terms. The uneasy and ill-defined status of local agents in indigenous missions worldwide would cause problems time and again during the later imperial arena.

The Royal Bounty grant is just one among several contemporary schemes designed to facilitate the continuing political, economic and cultural assimilation of Scotland with England, along with measures such as the Royal Bank of Scotland, and the Board of Trustees for Fisheries, Manufactures and Improvements in Scotland. The scheme certainly hindered any further growth of Catholicism in the Gàidhealtachd, and contributed to the apparently terminal decline of jacobitism in the region by the end of the 1720s. At the same time, however, it may have set up too many expectations among Gaelic intelligentsia and gentry alike. Given the lack of any effective framework of civil support in the west, obstructive heritors and government bureaucracy alike, and a continuing shortfall of qualified personnel, the more ambitious aims of the Synod of Glenelg and the Royal Bounty would be stillborn. Gains would certainly be made in Wester Ross, expedited by the inability of the episcopalian church to replace the older generation of their ministers, but the wholesale conversion of Catholics originally envisaged by the church remained a fantasy. Within the

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<sup>213</sup> NAS, CH1/2/66, fos. 67r.-v.; /70, fos. 345, 351; for a more pious view, see Donald Sage, *Memorabilia domestica: or parish life in the north of Scotland* (Edinburgh, 1889), 1-22; also J.H. Dixon, *Gairloch and guide to Loch Maree* (1886: Gairloch, 1980), 67, 323.

organisation itself, the affair of the Synod of Glenelg was a clear demonstration that missionaries could expect only a subordinate rôle in supervising the conversion of their own country. For the missionaries themselves, there would be no prizes in the Royal Bounty. The early workings of the scheme offer another indicator of the difficulty Gaels found in negotiating the new British state and its bureaucracy. Some twenty years after its founding, some Gaels would attempt to claim a place at its heart by force. When this failed, others would carve out an alternative niche in Canada or within the British army.

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